

You Are All One

Debunking hierarchy in Christianity



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Preface

In the last several chapters of the Gospel of John, we see that Jesus washed his disciples' feet and then spoke at length about humility and unity among them. Through his own example he had shown what the kingdom of God was to be like: upside-down from that of the world with its chains of command and power structures. Though God in the flesh, their Master and Creator, he demonstrated with a powerful object lesson what it means to lead in his kingdom. This was not the wielding of power but the laying aside of privilege to lead by example, and those who would refuse to model it would have no part with him.

Yet somehow this model was quickly forgotten. Worldly power was sanitized and polished rather than abandoned, with the meanings of service and humility turned on their heads. To keep power and control while also keeping the appearance and language of their opposites was an early but silent *coup d'état* against the Body of Christ. This body model, where no part commands another or tries to expel another, was transformed into that of a chain, an army, or a business, with pious-sounding terminology to cover what it really was.

You may have heard about the way bank tellers are trained to spot counterfeit currency: they are never shown anything but real bills, such that whatever is not authentic will be easy to identify. In the same way, the best approach to exposing false or harmful teachings in Christianity is to study the Bible so carefully that anything false will be easy to spot. I believe this focus will prove to be more useful than simply listing all the ways in which Christendom implements control over the people.

But let me say that this is not a blanket condemnation of all who are loyal to a denomination or feel strongly about a style of worship or fellowship. I personally spent almost fifty years in what I now call The Institution, and it took several of those years for me to listen to the gentle prompting of the Spirit to leave. It is a matter of personal conviction, as are many other things in Christianity. But my purpose in this book is to show that neither Jesus nor any of the writers of the New Testament intended for Christianity to be an organization or business or mere religion. It is a relationship with God and with His people, a life and family. My goal is to examine scripture and find out what it teaches, and whether what has been practiced is in violation of those teachings. These are my personal observations and convictions, which I hope will prompt the reader to at least dare to question the status quo and listen for the Spirit's voice in this matter. In a world that seems to tolerate almost any idea, this request of mine hardly seems like much to ask.

This book is not light reading but a careful examination of key texts bearing on the topic of what the Body of Christ was meant to be. So the best way to use it is to have your copy of the scriptures open to the passage under examination as you go along. We will discover how an insistence upon hierarchy has affected marriage and family, gathering together with other believers, and our contacts with the world. And we will

see that equality is not something dangerous or heretical, but the very thing Jesus came to establish. We must, like Jesus when He was tempted by Satan in the wilderness, fight erroneous interpretations of scripture with correct ones. And while of course no one can claim infallibility in this (although some do try), we can do our best to ensure that our interpretations are not the result of poor reasoning or shallow reading comprehension, and that they do not contradict any clear passages of scripture or try to hold to contradictory ideas.

Not as much attention will be paid to the Old Testament period after Adam and Eve, other than to briefly touch on some issues of social order which contradict popular misconceptions. I am mainly concerned with this matter of controlling people as it applies to Christians, and for that we need to focus mostly on the New Testament, especially the Letters.

I will abbreviate some frequently-used terms such as NT for New Testament and OT for Old Testament. Since the Greek word *ekklesia* (typically translated as “church”) is not easily conveyed in a short English word (the assembly, the called out ones, the community of believers, etc.), I’ll just transliterate the Greek word.

All scripture references, unless otherwise noted, are taken unashamedly from the TNIV, a faithful and reasonably accurate translation of the Bible. For the record, even the TNIV has retained some of the language of domination, but there are few that do not. Is that proof of God’s approval of hierarchy? Keep reading.

This book is dedicated to all those believers who have been brave enough to challenge tradition, sometimes at great personal cost, and whose insights and dedication have both inspired others and provided a base upon which those that followed would stand. I am especially grateful to God for the ease with which we today can access all the wisdom of the past and present that is written or recorded in some way. And I pray that we will all use these opportunities to remove any and all obstacles to salvation and discipleship, to free the oppressed, and to restore to purity and simplicity the Body of Christ in anticipation of His soon return.

Genesis

Our study must begin in Genesis, because we cannot fully understand why the New Testament (NT) writers referred to it until we know what it actually says. If a text is used as an authoritative foundation, then the principle being referred to must be established there. So we need to know what did—and did not—transpire in the first three chapters.

In chapter one we read of the creation of humankind. Gen. 1:27-28 states clearly that both male and female were made in the image of God, and that both of them were given dominion over all the lower life forms. No mention is made of any hierarchy between male and female. And if chronology or sequence is an indicator of authority, then a consistent argument would conclude that mankind was the greatest simply because they were made last. Yet when it comes to people, this alleged principle is discarded in a logical fallacy known as “special pleading”: In spite of Eve being made after Adam, she is held to be inferior for that very reason. In only that instance is the last made inferior to the first.

In chapter two we are given some additional detail concerning creation. We are told that God formed the person (adam was not a personal name yet) from the dust of the earth (vs. 7), outside of the Garden of Eden. The human was then placed into the garden (vs. 15), and note that he was given two charges: to cultivate it and to guard it. The Hebrew word typically translated “keep” is not another word for cultivate but instead indicates protection and responsibility for the safety of all within it. This identical word is used later by Cain when he sarcastically replies to God, “Am I my brother’s keeper?” (Gen. 4:9) But note that the “position” of guardian is not a position of rule or mastery. The guards on the city walls are not kings or magistrates but servants.

It is only after being charged with the care and protection of the garden that the man is told not to eat of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil (TKGE), and only after that do we see the first thing God calls “not good”: that the human should be alone. Be careful not to read between the lines here: the man did not make this observation nor complain about loneliness. In fact, no place in the entire Bible tells us why the man should not be alone. But we can observe that this is stated after the charge to protect and the warning about the fruit of the TKGE.

Scripture does give us an indirect clue: there was some weakness in the human, some need or deficiency. We are told that his being alone was to be remedied by the entrance of what is called in Hebrew an *ezer kenegdo* (Strong’s 5827 and 5048), which means a strong one facing him, a partner equal to a task, an ally. This in no way indicates an underling, assistant, secretary, “daddy’s little helper”, or employee, but an equal. God Himself is described as an *ezer* in other OT references (2 Chron. 4:11, 26:7, 1 Sam. 7:12, Ps. 28:7, etc.).

Yet between the pronouncement of the human’s need and the fulfillment of the remedy, we see that God wanted to show him something: He brought animals to him

to be named. Again, use caution in forming conclusions from this act, which no scripture ever cites as the establishment of authority. Humans were both to be given authority over the animals, as we've already seen, even though Eve was not there to name them. So how could the naming of animals be seen as an act of male authority over female when no female yet existed? If Eve had been made before this and was forbidden to name the animals, perhaps a case could be made for ascribing some kind of preeminence to Adam, but this is not the situation. And since ch. 1 told us that God gave "them" authority over animals only after both existed, we know that Adam could not have named the animals before Eve as an act of authority.

Notice that the animals, like the human, were made from dust. This is a critical fact, as will be shown. Most commentators emphasize "for the human no suitable ezer was found", and this too is important. But nothing is said about God wanting to show the human that he had no mate, only that none of the animals were suitable to be the ezer he needed.

When the human awakens from his sleep, he is shown his ezer at last. Immediately Adam exclaims that she is "his flesh and bones". This is in obvious contrast to the animals, who though made from the dust as he was, did not share in his flesh. Eve was thus established as not beneath Adam but beside him, equal, "a strong one facing him". Technically, she was Adam's clone! And as such, there could not possibly have been any hierarchy between them. Never anywhere in scripture is she even hinted at as being second, less, behind, beneath, or a follower of Adam. In fact we see quite the opposite of authority by chronology in the remainder of the OT: Abel over Cain, Isaac over Ishmael, Jacob over Esau, David over all seven of his older brothers, etc. And God's purpose in that was deliberate: to glorify Himself and not the vessels of His will (Deut. 7:7, 1 Cor. 1:28).

So I believe it is firmly established in these first two chapters of Genesis that no hierarchy existed between Adam and Eve. The only stated differences between them are these: that Adam was to guard the garden, and that he alone had firsthand experience with God's creative power. This will prove to be pivotal to our understanding of chapter three.

But before we go there, notice that this is the point where we read, "for this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will be one flesh." The man is to do the leaving and cleaving; he joins to her, not she to him. Were the direction reversed, I'm quite sure that advocates of male supremacy would cite this as proof of a husband's authority. This will ultimately prove to be significant, since it symbolizes the fact that Jesus left "his father's house" to join to His Bride, not she to Him. Something to consider.

Immediately in chapter three we read of the serpent (lit. "shining one") tempting Eve. Yet many would add a phantom story between chapters two and three, namely that Eve began to lust for an alleged authority over Adam. Yet no such scripture or story exists, not even in the NT. Eve is never attributed with the beginnings of sin, of lust, of desire, or of anything else before the serpent tempted her. And she was not hiding from Adam; vs. 6 tells us that he was with her.

Neither does scripture ever tell us why the serpent targeted Eve; not one place in either Testament even touches on the question. But remember that observation of Eve being the one who had no direct experience with God's creative power? Surely the serpent knew that Adam would not be fooled into thinking he could be like God, but Eve was vulnerable due to her inexperience. And again, in ref. to vs. 6, there are no words to the effect that she tempted or reasoned with Adam in order to get him to eat the fruit; she simply handed it to him, and he took it without even putting up a mild protest.

So we can discard all the speculation about Eve sneaking around or lusting or plotting or tempting, and we can also dismiss any notion of Adam being unaware of the source of the fruit or of the serpent's temptation of Eve. As vs. 17 will show, he merely "listened to the voice of his wife" (heard the temptation and her responses) instead of guarding as he was commanded. Adam's lack of deception was not to his credit but to his great shame! Eve was "beguiled" but Adam was not, yet he sinned anyway, failing to guard as well as eating the fruit with his eyes wide open.

Before this fateful event, we have seen that Adam had no authority over Eve, that neither chronology nor naming is ever tied to authority by scripture, and that Adam had no authority even over the animals until after Eve was made. She had nothing to usurp or desire before she was tempted. If the argument is made that she had the warning about the TKGE wrong, and it is presumed she only got it from Adam (even though nobody in scripture ever says so), then the fact that neither Adam nor God nor even the serpent points this out is significant. No scripture ever calls Eve inherently deceivable nor forgetful nor mistaken, nor that she lied about the warning. Scripture rarely mentions Eve when discussing the fall of man, but when it does mention her she is only shown to be the one the serpent beguiled, and this is never portrayed as some kind of fault in her. Neither does any scripture ever call Adam the "federal head" of his wife, typically offered to account for sin being laid solely at his feet. So let us put to rest any notions about the fall being somehow Eve's fault.

Now we come at last to what I would call The Confrontation. Many would like to attach significance to Adam's being confronted first, but no scripture ever does so. And many miss the structure of this confrontation, namely that it is in the form of a chiasm. A chiasm (named after the Greek letter X or chi) is when someone makes a series of points toward a central point, then traces back through the points in reverse order. Thus we can find the central point being made by watching for where the "mirror image" begins. And in this case, the crux or pivot point of this confrontation is the curse on the serpent and subsequent remedy through the seed of the woman. The order is man, woman, serpent, woman, man. So this order of confrontation has more to do with making a point than with some alleged preeminence.

But notice Adam's reaction when God asks him about the fruit: he blames Eve directly and God Himself indirectly ("the woman you gave me")! The serpent and the temptation is never mentioned by Adam; he takes no responsibility and shows no remorse or indication of sacrifice for Eve's sake, as some allege. He had stood silently by, listening to the serpent deceive his wife, and took the fruit from her without comment or question.

When Eve is confronted she simply states the truth: “the serpent deceived me and I ate.” No passing blame to Adam, no argument about what a great idea eating the fruit was supposed to be, no protest about it being unfair that she was beneath Adam... just telling what happened.

At this point God doesn't even ask the serpent any questions but launches immediately into a curse upon him. But notice that God begins with “Because you have done this...”. And in this context of cursing the serpent, God pronounces the ultimate remedy: the seed of the woman would crush the seed of the serpent. In all this debate nobody ever seems to ask why it would be the seed of only the woman that would bring the Savior. Why was Adam not to be a part of this? Scripture never says. Scripture also never says why the sign of the covenant between God and Abraham, circumcision (Gen. 17:10-27, Rom. 4:11), was chosen for males, but it may very well have a connection with Jesus being called the Last Adam (1 Cor. 15:45-49).

To the woman God never says “Because you have done this...”. And what He does say is disputed: was it “I will multiply your suffering in childbirth”, or was it “A snare has increased your sorrow; in sorrow you will bear children”? The first is from the Masoretic text, which post-dates the NT by hundreds of years. It was made long after the beginning of the church, long after the rabbis had made their own corrupt version of the Septuagint (LXX) to combat the Christians' use of the original LXX to prove Jesus was the Messiah. The issue of textual corruption is beyond the scope of this writing, but there are good articles available (such as [this one](#)) and I would encourage you to look into them. At the very least we should note that the word for “sorrow” is identical to the word that God will use in describing Adam's toil. But most importantly, Eve herself is never told that something she did is the reason for this, unlike Adam and the serpent.

Then God makes a prediction (not a command): Eve would desire or turn toward her husband. This desire is lifted from context and given all sorts of imaginative meanings by many. They say it must be sexual desire, or lust for power, and try to bolster such views by bringing in an outside context: that of the desire of “sin” to have Cain (Gen. 4:7). But even there we see that it is Cain himself, not anything he allegedly possesses such as power or position over another, that sin desires. It wants the man, not his rank. Likewise, Eve is never said to want anything belonging to Adam but the man himself, and unlike sin, she is not an evil entity.

So God is telling Eve that she is about to make a critical choice, and that this choice would result in something that did not exist before (or it wouldn't be predicted): her husband would rule over her. Had this rule already existed God would have only said that it would be stronger or harsher, but since no such rule is stated anywhere before this in any form, the context only supports the existence of rule by Adam over Eve after sin. To put it bluntly, it is the man that will now usurp authority over the woman, whom God had created as his equal. Ironically, today many men accuse women who want equality of attempting to usurp the very authority they themselves got by usurping.

We must also consider the fact that God had just finished telling the serpent that the woman he beguiled would be his ultimate undoing, and that God Himself would put

extreme hostility between her and him. This is no physical fear of snakes (besides, fear and hostility are two completely different things) on the part of only women, but a special seething hatred between the forces of Satan and the progeny of only Eve, because from her seed alone would come the promised Messiah.

History is replete with proof of this hostility. Women have been Satan's supreme objects of hatred, being oppressed and treated as property across cultures and eras. Satan surely laughs at how even Christian men who should know better have viewed women, beginning with some of the so-called "church fathers", just like many of the Jews before them, as you can see [here](#):

- "Rather should the words of the Torah be burned than entrusted to a woman... Whoever teaches his daughter the Torah is like one who teaches her obscenity." *Rabbi Eliezer*
- "Do you not know that you are each an Eve? The sentence of God on this sex of yours lives in this age: the guilt must of necessity live too. You are the Devil's gateway: You are the unsealer of the forbidden tree: You are the first deserter of the divine law: You are she who persuaded him whom the devil was not valiant enough to attack. You destroyed so easily God's image, man. On account of your desert even the Son of God had to die." *St. Tertullian*
- "What is the difference whether it is in a wife or a mother, it is still Eve the temptress that we must beware of in any woman... I fail to see what use woman can be to man, if one excludes the function of bearing children." *St. Augustine of Hippo*
- "As regards the individual nature, woman is defective and misbegotten, for the active force in the male seed tends to the production of a perfect likeness in the masculine sex; while the production of woman comes from a defect in the active force or from some material indisposition, or even from some external influence." *St. Thomas Aquinas*
- "If they [women] become tired or even die, that does not matter. Let them die in childbirth, that's why they are there." *Martin Luther*
- "Most of these feminists are radical, frustrated lesbians, many of them, and man-haters, and failures in their relationships with men, and who have declared war on the male gender. The Biblical condemnation of feminism has to do with its radical philosophy and goals. That's the bottom line." *Jerry Falwell*
- "God, by creating Adam first (Gen. 2:18; 1 Cor. 11:8) and also by creating woman for man (Gen. 2:18,20,22; 1 Cor. 11:9), has set the gender-based role and responsibility of males in the most basic unit of society (the family) to be that of leader, provider and self-sacrificial protector (also cf. Eph. 5:25; 1 Peter 3:7), and likewise has set the gender-based role and responsibility of females to be that of help and nurture (Gen. 2:18) and life-giving (Gen. 3:20) under male leadership and protection (cf. 1 Peter 3:7)" *The Council on Biblical Manhood & Womanhood*
- "make dads the godly leaders [of the family] with the women in submission, raising kids for the glory of God." *Randall Terry, Operation Rescue*
- "In the beginning God made man male and female. He made Adam first, and then made Eve from Adam's rib. This order of creation subordinates wives to their husbands in marriage, and women to men in the church. As an act of submission to their Creator women are commanded to submit to their

husbands and to male leadership in the church. Women are not allowed to teach or have authority over men in any formal capacity in the church.”
Reformation Fellowship of the East Valley, Mesa, AZ

Astoundingly, Christian teachers today are encouraging women to commit Eve's critical blunder in following men. They think her decision to look only to Adam instead of remaining in the garden with God was a good thing instead of a disaster, both for her and for all her daughters to come. It did not have to be, as we will learn when covering God's pronouncement on Adam, and should not be perpetuated.

Finally we come to Adam. God begins with “Because you have done this...” so we know that Adam is being held responsible for his actions, just as the serpent was; the serpent tempted and Adam failed to guard, blaming even God for his sin. But before we go on, let's remember that the only penalty God had stated before for eating the fruit was death. Again, no scripture defines this death explicitly, so we can only speculate on its meaning and scope. We must not immediately interject “spiritual death”, which no scripture ever mentions as happening here. Both Adam and Eve ate the fruit and suffered this “death”, but no other penalty was stated. So why were there additional penalties for Adam alone? (And remember that the serpent was never a part of the prohibition against eating the fruit, so we need not include him in this point.)

Once again, scripture never spells out why there were additional penalties beyond death. But we have seen that Adam alone passed blame, extending his sin in a way that Eve did not. He openly and willingly rebelled against God, while Eve had to be tricked into eating the fruit yet never tried to deny it nor pass blame to anyone but the guilty party, that being the serpent.

Now look at the details of what God says to Adam. First of all, it is not Adam himself but the ground that is cursed; there is no curse on Adam, Eve, or human nature. Then Adam is told he would have to work hard to get this cursed ground to produce food (ironically, many women have been forced by men into this which was Adam's burden alone to bear). And it is only in this address to Adam that God says “you came from dust and will return to dust”. Only Adam was made from dust, remember? It should then come as no surprise that it is that very dust which God cursed and to which Adam would return.

There is another factor in building the case for why this was only Adam's penalty, but first we need to address an event typically used as another “proof” of Adam's authority over Eve: he names his wife. But not only is this after sin, it is never cited by any scripture as an act of authority. We should consider the fact that the slave Hagar would later give God a name (Gen. 16:13), and also that it is parents who have the authority to name their children, not spouses naming each other. Some try to do exactly that by mentioning Gen. 5:3 where “Adam... had a son in his own likeness, in his own image, and he named him Seth”. But Seth was Adam's child, not his spouse. So just as naming animals is never called an act of authority in scripture, neither is Adam's naming of Eve.

Now to the remainder of the fallout of Adam's rebellion and treachery (see a literal translation of Job 31:33). In Gen. 3:22 we read that God says only “the man” must

be prevented from eating of the Tree of Life, and it is only “the man” who is banished from the garden “to work the ground from which he had been taken.” No mention is made of Eve here, yet as God predicted, we know she “desired” Adam and went with him. But God never ordered her out. Again, speculation, but it is not unreasonable to think that had she stayed, she would have given birth to the Messiah herself. Tragically, for her and all her daughters, she made the wrong choice, and thereby took upon herself the same penalties as were only meant for Adam, along with her own willingness to be dominated. Christian women today are being told that they must look only to a husband or father or priest, not directly to Christ, and thus to volunteer for the same domination as Eve. Her legacy to her daughters is not a deceivable mind but a willingness to be ruled by men.

In conclusion, much of what has been taught about these early chapters of Genesis relies heavily upon reading between the lines and presuming principles without foundation or contextual warrant. We have seen that this passage is a good place to go when one wishes to defend the order of creation, the origin of sin and death, and the promise of the Savior. Clearly, the cause of Eve’s sin was deception (her “desire” did not exist until **after** she was tempted), so it is quite understandable that the NT writers would refer to this passage for that very reason, along with a rebuttal to pagan falsehoods about creation order. But what it completely lacks is any sort of hierarchy between the sexes by virtue of chronology, naming, or even guarding. There is no establishment of “family order”, civil government, or religious hierarchy.

So when anyone in scripture refers to this to make a point, we must remember what possible points can be made from it. Those to whom the apostles wrote would have been familiar with these writings and knew them to be from God, and would therefore accept the reference as a valid witness or premise in an argument. What they would **not** accept would be a new interpretation or new law to be inserted into it. So the fact that Genesis is appealed to tells us that the basis for the appeal must be seen there and be clear to everyone. And hierarchy between the sexes is nowhere to be seen before Adam and Eve leave the garden.

Unfolding Revelation

After Adam and Eve leave the garden, scripture focuses on genealogy. But from the start we see the practice of patriarchy. Is this proof of an implicit approval by God? Not at all. In those same scriptures we see murder, betrayal, theft, rape, disfigurement, and many other evils, yet no one claims that their mere appearance in scripture constitutes divine approval. And there are some instances where the evil was simply reported and not explicitly condemned, which undermines any attempt to argue that if God does not condemn something He must therefore approve it. Such would be an example of the fallacy of argument from silence.

We also see, in general, a practice known as primogeniture. This is a social tradition that gives the firstborn son a double portion of the inheritance. Yet we have more than the lack of explicit approval by God to label this practice as, at best, not His intention: whenever God did step in to human history, He tended to choose the young over the old, the least over the greatest, and the weak over the strong, as mentioned in the chapter on Genesis. It was Abel and not his older brother Cain who had God's blessing; it was Isaac and not his older brother Ishmael who was the child of promise; it was Jacob and not his older brother Esau who inherited Isaac's estate and the blessing of the firstborn; it was Joseph and not his older brothers who was chosen to rule over his family and save his people from starvation (as well as his life being an amazing type of Christ); it was David who was chosen over all his seven older brothers to be king of Israel and through whose line the Messiah would come. And of course it was the insignificant town of Nazareth where Jesus grew up. Even the choice of Israel over much larger and nobler nations was deliberate (Deut. 7:6-7).

And what was God's purpose in doing this? To glorify Himself and make it plain that people could not take any of the credit belonging to God. As He told the prophet Samuel when he went to the house of Jesse to anoint the next king of Israel, "Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things human beings look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart" (1 Sam. 16:7). Outward appearance necessarily includes sex, skin color, height, strength, birth order, tradition, social standing, and anything else that is external and visible. So God has said both explicitly and by example that none of those things are the criteria by which He judges people or chooses them for His service.

At this point we should also note that even though God had promised the Savior back in the garden of Eden, He did not plan to either end human history immediately nor dump out His entire plan all at once. As stated in Heb. 1:1, God revealed His will progressively, a little at a time. He did not choose to keep us all from making mistakes or doing harm to ourselves along the way. This can be illustrated by an old story about people pulling a heavy cart up a hill (ref. unknown). After pulling for some distance they would need to stop and rest, so they would put a block behind one of the wheels. The purpose of the block was not to pull the cart but stop it from going

backwards down the hill. In the same way, God has not constantly micromanaged the human race but would allow us to go for a while and then intervene with a “block” of sorts to keep us from losing ground. Such “blocks” took the form of things we will study such as the institution of government, establishing Israel, giving the Law, sending the Messiah, and setting up the *ekklesia*.

So when God intervenes with a stop-gap measure, we must not fall into the trap of thinking that such a thing was His ideal from the beginning. He shows throughout the OT His tolerance for imperfection and willingness to make concessions for a greater ultimate goal. A good example is when the Pharisees asked Jesus why Moses had permitted divorce, and Jesus’ response was that it was a concession to people’s hard hearts (Mt. 19:8). It would have been far more cruel to force people to stay married if one or both had already divorced them mentally or spiritually. Obviously God would have preferred that people be kind and loving to each other, and treat each other as the “one flesh” He had intended. Another example is that of slavery laws for Israel. God did not do away with slavery but instead gave laws on how slaves were to be treated. Unless one wishes to defend the institution of slavery on this basis, it is easy for us to see that such laws by God are in no way a divine sanction but merely an act of tolerance or concession. Yet as we will see in our study of the NT, this principle will be ignored when the topic changes from slavery to women.

There are some notable examples of God’s circumvention of human plans, ones which what we could call “the control spirit” tries to twist and cover up in an effort to oppress women. Note that these are all OT references:

- Miriam, older sister of Moses, prophesied as any male in the OT and was recognized as such by God (Exodus 15:20, Micah 6:4)
- Deborah was a prophet, a judge, and a military commander of Israel (Judges 4:4-10); there is no fine print or disclaimer saying God only chose her as a last resort or punishment
- Huldah said “This is what the LORD says” as any male prophet (2 Kings 22:14, 2 Chron. 34:22), and during a time when a more famous male prophet (Jeremiah) was active

And of course it follows that if God allowed this in the OT, and if He is less legalistic in the NT, then to silence such women in the *ekklesia* would be a giant step backwards. This becomes a problem for those who want to bar Christian women from leadership over men while still acknowledging that they are better off now than ever before.

Aside from women who led and prophesied in the OT, we also have examples of wives that were hardly the model of blind subservience to their husbands, and both married and single women who showed every bit of the courage allegedly only possessed by men. Abraham was told by God to listen to his wife Sarah regarding the sending away of Hagar and Ishmael (Gen. 21:12); Abigail, described as not only beautiful but also intelligent and wise, acted without her husband’s knowledge or approval to appease King David and avert the disaster her “foolish” husband Nabal was about to bring upon them (1 Sam. 25:3-38); Ruth, a Moabite, boldly approached Boaz and told him of his obligation as a kinsman-redeemer (Ruth 3:9); Esther took

her life in her hands to approach King Xerxes to save her people, and she gave instructions to her uncle as well (Esther 4:9-17). And who can forget the ideal woman as portrayed in Proverbs 31? She is a business owner, a land assessor, a manager, a craftsperson, known for her wisdom and hard work, and all while being a wife and mother. All these women are commended for their fortitude and wisdom, their boldness and character. None of them are in any way reprimanded for their actions. Can Christian women be less free, less wise, less independent, less capable? Many today would have us believe that lie.

As for the institution of government being sanctioned by God, that did not formally occur until after Noah stepped off the Ark after the Flood (Gen. 9:5-6). Of course people gradually formed more complicated methods of governance, but God drew the line at the Tower of Babel (Gen. 11:1-9). While little detail is given as to what was wrong with this plan to keep people from scattering over the earth, we do know that it displeased God. Other possible factors such as corruption, slave labor, and false religion would have to be proposed from extra-Biblical sources. But the purpose of government is to restrain evil, a stop-gap measure meant to keep people at a minimal level of civilization. It is not meant by God as a system of slavery for all people regardless of character. As explained later by Paul in 1 Tim. 1:9, "the law is made not for the righteous but for lawbreakers and rebels, the ungodly and sinful..."

It is only when God establishes the nation of Israel after the exodus from Egypt that He gives any degree of detail on how government should run. And these instructions were only given to His chosen people Israel. Of course there would be overlap with existing governments, but again this is not so much a divine stamp of approval on them as it is a concession to human frailty and sin. It amounts to a way of containing sin to keep it from impinging on the lives of the righteous, per 1 Tim. 1:9 above. And many have written about the fact that these particular laws were ahead of their time in terms of health and safety.

God's original plan was that Israel would be a theocracy, with God as King. But again we see His concession, with warnings, to their demand for a king in 1 Sam. 8:7. Already in ancient Israel there was the mindset of control, of craving the way of the world. They were the nation that saw God rain down plagues upon Egypt; they saw God part the Red Sea; they were miraculously able to defeat much larger and stronger nations on their way to the Promised Land. But, like us, they preferred to be enslaved by humans just like them. Truly this control spirit is a powerful one. We must not underestimate it or become lax in opposing it.

But I must take a moment here to expose a very bad translation in the OT which has been used to infer that if a woman leads a nation, it is a sign of God's anger. Most Bibles render Isaiah 3:12 as follows:

Youths oppress my people, women rule over them. My people, your guides lead you astray; they turn you from the path.

The intentional error of this rendering was exposed long ago by scholar Dr. Katharine Bushnell, but her work has largely been ignored. Here is her examination of the issue:

621. I think we find another case of prejudiced translation in Isaiah 3:12. The word translated “children” in this verse in Isaiah, is a plural masculine participle of the verb “to glean,” “abuse,” “practice.” It is translated “glean” in Leviticus 19:10, Deuteronomy 24:21, Judges 20:45, and Jeremiah 6:9. **The word has no translation such as “children” anywhere else in the Bible**, and it occurs 21 times. Another word altogether is used for “children,” and “child,” in verses 4 and 5 of this same chapter; the sense seems to have been fixed by the supposed context, to correspond with “women.”

As to the word translated “women”: Two words, without the rabbinical vowel “points,” are exactly alike. One is pronounced *nosh-im* and the other *na-shim*. In appearance the only difference is a slight mark under the first letter of the Hebrew word *na-shim*. The first word means “exactors;” the one with a vowel mark under the initial letter means “women.” **The entire decision, therefore, as to whether the word means one or the other depends upon OPTION. Those who pointed the word, evidently thought the nation could sink no lower than to pass under women rulers**, and then translated the word “children” to match it. Commentators frequently call attention to the alternate reading. See Adam Clarke on the passage. The Septuagint translates: **“As for my people, tax-gatherers (praktores) glean them, and exactors (apaitountes) rule over them.”**

622. There seems little in the context to support the translation “children” and “women.” But study the context as regards the other reading. After complaining of the “gleaners,” (that is, “tax-gatherers”) and “extortioners,” they are threatened in the following language: “The Lord standeth up to plead and standeth up to judge the people. The Lord will enter into judgment with the elders of His people, and the princes (‘rulers,’ masculine, not feminine gender), thereof for ye have eaten up the vineyard (the conduct of extortionate tax-gatherers), and the spoil of the poor is in your houses. What mean ye that ye crush (R. V.) my people, and grind the faces of the poor?” Because of this context, we believe that OPTION took the wrong turn when it decided to translate this verse as it stands in our English version; and that this translation would have had a strong showing up of its sophistries, had educated women been on the last Revision Committee. ([God’s Word to Women](#), emphasis mine)

Gone in a few paragraphs is the sole proof-text for the alleged divine wrath expressed in having women in national government’s top positions.

The most important principle I hope to have established in this chapter is that God is not interested in micromanagement or enslavement, but guidance and compassion. In spite of the efforts of human society and sin to thwart this principle, God works through and around them in order to make ultimate good come from our weaknesses. He does not throw lightening bolts at even the most brazen rebels, nor trample the most weak and vulnerable. He intervenes just enough and at just the right times to keep the cart from rolling back down the hill, so to speak.

The control spirit, in stark contrast, always tries to control and restrict for the sake of sheer power and greed. It sees everything in terms of hierarchy and cannot fathom equality or mutual kindness. It knows nothing of compassion or patience, of justice or

mercy. It has an insatiable appetite to command and conquer and cannot just let people be. But while God will tolerate some things for a time, He will not let this spirit run rampant forever. It still serves some purpose and so will continue until God says to it as He did to the builders of the Tower of Babel, "Enough!" But as we've seen in the examples above, this is no reason not to oppose the control spirit at every possible turn. It may well be that we, like Esther, have come to where we are for the very purpose of throwing off this evil spirit and proclaiming the freedom we have in Christ.

Time For An Intervention

In the chapter on Unfolding Revelation we learned that God had been gradually revealing details of His redemptive plan as history moved along, and thus that time is an important element of context. In Gal. 4:4-5 we read, “But **when the set time had fully come**, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship” (meaning the full legal rights of an heir in that culture; see Rom. 8:15,23, 9:4, Eph. 1:5). So now we turn our attention to the very pivot point of history, the most obvious divine intervention since creation week: the arrival of Jesus the Anointed One, the Messiah, the Savior, the Son of God.

While in the past God had conceded by making rules that governed flawed human social constructs such as slavery and patriarchy, Jesus announced in word and deed that such things were now to be phased out, beginning with Israel. He took the Pharisaical, ultra-legal view of the Sabbath and showed the true intent of that law (Mark 2:27); He repeatedly exposed their evil intent in laying heavy burdens on people that they themselves would not lift (Luke 11:46); He showed them the hypocrisy of legalistic perfection that was devoid of the more important matters of the heart (Mt. 23:23); He overturned their self-righteous presumption that the sick and diseased were a lower class of sinner than they were, or that only such sinners were cursed with disease or poverty (Luke 13:1-5, John 9:2-3). In short, Jesus’ condemnation was overwhelmingly on those with power and control, not their victims. Not one of those religious leaders was commended for being authoritative and elitist. In fact, Jesus went so far as to tell His disciples, “You have to do as they say, but don’t do as they do” (Mt. 23:1-3). No kind words are to be found for anyone who overstepped their authority.

But all this softening of the Law was only the beginning. Jesus actually did more by His actions than His words to move from softening to overthrowing. However, before we examine those actions we should make a point about His first public reading of scripture from Isaiah, as reported in Luke 4:16-19 (emphasis mine): “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the **poor**. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the **prisoners** and recovery of sight for the **blind**, to set the **oppressed** free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” Jesus’ mission was foremost one of release and rescue, a message not restricted to the privileged; in fact, they are never the ones who need to be set free (Mark 2:17), but are almost always the oppressors. So He came at this point in history to do much more than tolerate and concede.

Now to His actions. His very first miracle was at the command of a woman, His mother, in John 2:1-5. Today’s controllers would view such a thing by a religious leader as un-manly and spineless! They would instead have had Jesus pulling rank and rebuking her. Another was in Luke 4 when He healed a man **in the synagogue** who was possessed by demons. He also healed Peter’s mother-in-law (Luke 4 again), the sick (many references), the diseased (lepers, paralytics, blind), and even

a few non-Jews (Mt. 15, Luke 7), one of which was a woman who actually argued with Jesus— and won! The elitists and control freaks of His day considered such people beneath them and therefore undeserving of mercy, even within their own synagogue. But Jesus gave powerful object lessons that not even the most hard-headed Pharisee could ignore.

So along with showing compassion for the oppressed, Jesus showed utter contempt for the self-righteous and elitist. His statement referenced earlier about having to obey the Pharisees is thus seen not as an endorsement of power and control, but as a rebuke of heartless burdens and double standards (and an object lesson for those today who say that “correct doctrine” alone makes a leader untouchable). And those rulers were actually usurping the authority of Moses and even God, substituting their own yet still thinking themselves to be guardians of divine law. (Mark 7:9). But this mentality hardly died out with the sect of the Pharisees; it lives and prospers in the *ekklesia* today, as it has since the apostles died.

And what of the rank or position of those Jesus chose to be in His inner circle? They were fishermen, tax collectors, ordinary people without religious standing. And beyond them in the larger group of followers we see former prostitutes, those who had been possessed by demons, the formerly lame and diseased. Yes, there were also women of means who provided for Jesus (Luke 8:2-3). And we don't know for sure whether any others who had wealth before necessarily lost it all when they followed Jesus. But the point is that wealth and status were not factors in Jesus' selections. He is, after all, the same God who told the prophet Samuel that He looks on the heart.

Sadly, though, and in spite of the short duration of their time with Jesus, these of humble beginnings who were chosen to be in the inner circle showed signs of the control disease. In Mt. 20:20-28 we read of the request of two disciples to have positions of preeminence in Jesus' coming kingdom. But Jesus did not restrict his rebuke to only those two. This important principle deserves to be quoted:

Jesus called them together and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. **Not so with you.** Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave— just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” (emphasis mine)

The “you” in that passage is plural throughout. Jesus is saying that the true servant is a servant to all, to the entire group. And if they knew they were not above their Master, then how could they claim to rise higher than He by wishing to rule over others of their own kind, something Jesus Himself did not do? People think that Jesus modeled the so-called “servant leader”, but did He not say explicitly here that He “did **not** come to be served”? Of course as God He was their leader, but **it was never His divinity that He modeled for others to take upon themselves.** When some argue otherwise, they fail to distinguish between that which Jesus was, and that which He intended for us to emulate.

Let us also examine the Greek of Jesus' rebuke. The terminology would be understood today as something like this: "Whoever of you who wants to be the one being served at the table must instead take the place of the waiter, and whoever of you who wants to be first in line must take the place of the lowest of slaves." Many today want precisely what Jesus condemns: the first place in line, the preeminence, the seat of honor, to the point of encouraging (sometimes even demanding) an "alpha male" attitude on the part of those that have come to be known as "pastors". But "alpha males" are typically found among packs of wolves! In all Jesus said about any who would serve as shepherds, He never portrayed them as overlords, bosses, rulers, or deserving of pampering by the sheep. Instead, they were described as gentle to sheep yet deadly to wolves, leading not by force but by example, being servants to the sheep, to the point of carrying on their shoulders (not under their arms or behind them on leashes) even the smallest one that wandered away. Only a controller would want to be an "alpha".

At least the disciples of Jesus were indignant at the conceit of the two seeking important positions, but what of today's Christian leaders? Even if they recognize error in some of their own number, do they express any rebuke? Do they even offer a weak protest? No, they are either cowardly silent or boldly supportive! They are like Nicodemus, who would only come to Jesus at night, or unnamed others who stayed in the closet for fear of losing their status in the synagogue. (John 3:1-2, 12:42). Quite possibly, some of them may even have "skeletons in the closet", that is, hidden sins that they would risk having exposed if they did the same to their peers. Satan has blackmailed them into silence.

In all fairness, though, the sheep are expected to know the voice of their shepherd. Yet if they have been conditioned to follow "hired hands" (John 10:12) who abandon them to the enemy at the first sign of opposition, can we really blame people for wandering around aimlessly in a minefield of error? Jesus promised to lose none that are His (John 6:39), but they can wander far and wide, easy prey for deception, until the day Jesus finally draws them back into His fold. We need to show compassion for those lost sheep and care for them as a real shepherd should. At the same time, we must expose and oppose the fakes, the hired hands, the "alphas", in order to keep them from doing harm to the flock, which does not belong to them.

Another aspect of Jesus' lessons about humility and service, concerning Him in His humanity, is seen in Phil. 2:5-11. This elaborates on what He said here about not coming to be served. He laid privilege and power aside in order to stoop down and lift us up. After accomplishing this He returned to His former place of glory in heaven. And this teaching was powerfully illustrated at the Last Supper when He washed His disciples' feet. Why do you suppose Jesus told Peter he'd "have no part with" Jesus if his feet weren't washed too? Because service must be mutual; we must all be willing to serve and be served by our brothers and sisters.

What example is Jesus giving, especially since Paul in that passage in Philippians expressly states that these were examples for us to follow? Clearly, it is that we all should lay down any perceived status and rank for others. So even if one were to completely ignore all else the Bible says about the need for humility and service, thinking they do have divine privilege, these examples of Jesus should demolish once and for all the perceived right to retain such privilege. Can anyone still claim to

be a follower of Jesus while dismissing His example and refusing to walk in His steps?

It is not without reason that we read in Prov. 16:18, “Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall.” Those who extol the virtues of pride and rule should take warning. Which of them is exempt from “not so among you”? Which of them is greater than their Master? Which of them is not to follow Jesus in His example of laying privilege down? Which of them truly grasps the difference between a shepherd and a hired hand? When did Jesus set up a chain of command for his followers to rule over others among them? When did He tell any of them, even Peter, to take on the role of Father to the others’ Son?

It should be abundantly clear by now that Jesus never taught hierarchy among His followers, in any form, for any reason. But many insist that even if all that is true (which it is), there is still one lesser class, one in line behind them: women. We have examined the OT and found no divine sanction for such an idea, but since we’re looking now at examples from Jesus, how did He treat women?

In the account of the Samaritan woman Jesus met at the well in John 4, He openly conversed with her in spite of her being a woman, a Samaritan, and promiscuous. She discussed theology with Him, and it is to her that Jesus first spoke of a very radical change whose time had come:

... a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem... Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth.

No special places, no special buildings, no special human priesthood, only “spirit and truth”. This is nothing less than the blueprint for the coming *ekklesia*, something Jesus did not first give details about to His inner circle. And the woman ran quickly, not considering her despised status among her own people, telling everyone that this Jesus may be the Messiah. She was an evangelist in the truest sense of the word; men came to Jesus from her testimony alone. Ironically, and very sadly, many today would tell godly Christian women that they are in sin if they do the same!

Then there is Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus. In Luke 10:38-42 we see that she “sat at the Lord’s feet listening to what he said.” Jesus responded to her sister’s objection to this, telling her that “Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.” This was no petty jealousy or even a plea for help in the kitchen, but an attempt to keep Mary in her place. It was scandalous for a woman to sit as the student of a rabbi, especially as the sole student at the moment (bible.org). So we see an obvious example by Jesus that in Him there are no “roles” to play or appearances to protect, and He was openly defying the social norm. Even so, commentators today quickly engage in the logical fallacy of “special pleading” by insisting that, in spite of this, somehow Jesus was not overturning alleged “role distinctions”. We already know that this is not the first time Jesus did such a thing (nor that it would be the last), but even if it were, how many such instances would it take for them to acknowledge that Jesus was doing exactly that?

Other such incidences could be cited as well, such as Jesus' treatment of Mary Magdalene, His care for His mother as He hung on the cross, and His appearing to women first after His resurrection, charging them with telling the other disciples the good news. All these women are portrayed in scripture as brave, open to teaching, trustworthy witnesses, and full equals with men. And if people today wish to brush all of that aside and pretend it isn't there or impose twisted interpretations upon all the evidence, I pray that their eyes will be opened before they find themselves at the Judgment having never repented of this control spirit.

But we cannot end this chapter without confronting a common assertion: that because Jesus only chose males for His inner circle He thereby established an all-male leadership for the *ekklesia*. Yet if this amounts to such proof, then it also proves even more: that every local *ekklesia* must be led by a group of twelve, and that they all must be Jews! It also ignores the fact that this was all before the cross, before anyone really grasped the coming entity called the *ekklesia*, and that Jesus stated explicitly that He came first to His people Israel (Mt. 15:24). And in Rev. 21:14 we are told that while the names of the twelve tribes of Israel will be on the gates of the New Jerusalem, the names of the twelve apostles will be on the foundations. Clearly Jesus' inner circle is to be mapped to the tribes of Israel, and for that reason alone had to be all male Jews. We should also consider the fact that these were to be Jesus' witnesses (Acts 1:8, 22), and in that society women would not be formally recognized as such. I am quite certain that if this alleged principle were applied consistently, its proponents would find even more reasons to engage in special pleading.

In word and deed, time after time, from the beginning of His public ministry to His ascension, Jesus did away with any social norms that would get between His people and their Savior. Throughout that time, He did figuratively to the status quo what he did literally to the merchants in the temple (John 2:13-17). If I were a controller, I would consider that a threat.

A New Creation

Before Jesus returned to heaven He promised to send the Holy Spirit. The disciples were warned not to leave the area until then, an illustration in itself of the fact that we are powerless and lifeless without that Spirit. But notice that it was His apostles that He appeared to between His ascension and sending the Spirit (Acts 1:1-8). So it was to them He said "... you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." Yet no one believes that only they were to obey this commission, or that only they would have the Holy Spirit's power, because events soon to follow would make it obvious that all believers were to be included.

This establishes another important principle of interpretation: what seems so plain on the surface in one place may be illuminated further in another. This means that the so-called "plain reading" approach to Bible study is a poor substitute for considering every layer of context, from an individual word to the entire Bible to even the culture. And we must not confuse "plain reading" with a principle known as "Ockham's Razor" (Ockham's Razor is a principle proposed by William of Ockham in the fourteenth century: "Entities should not be multiplied unnecessarily", meaning theories should not be overly complex. It can be illustrated using the concept of computer software; one can make many upgrades or "patches" until it is better to simply write a new program. In hermeneutics (Bible interpretation), this would mean that any system which requires many exceptions or complex explanations is probably inaccurate. The problem comes in knowing where to draw the line; it is not an exact science.). Simplicity is good, but accuracy is better, and all pertinent data must be considered. Since the evidence about to be presented concerning the day of Pentecost is unambiguous in proving that the Holy Spirit was not limited to the apostles in Jesus' inner circle, we know that the scope of Jesus' commission is more than what the "plain reading" of the first chapter of Acts tells us.

Yet the objection will arise, "Then why can't we read into Genesis from other scriptures such as 1 Timothy?" The answer is that context is not a matter of reading any and every passage of scripture into any other, but of looking for commonality and considering each context on its own as well. In the case of hierarchy in Genesis, we have already seen that there is no such thing between Adam and Eve before they left the garden, and when Paul refers to it he does so to use what is already there as a basis for his argument. But with this passage in Acts we have events later in that same book to define its scope for us, and no Christian, to my knowledge, has ever claimed that women or slaves or non-Jews do not have the Spirit when becoming believers, since the NT so clearly says otherwise in many passages. Above all, we must be consistent. We cannot only read one scripture into another when it suits us and forbid it when it does not. Careful attention must be paid to each passage separately before we can look for commonality. Generally, if a passage is disputed, that is likely evidence of it not being as clear as we'd like.

So if all believers have the Holy Spirit and the commission to spread the gospel, then they also all have the right and duty of the additional detail of that same commission

in Mt. 28:16-20, which is to go everywhere and make disciples immersed in the names of the Persons of the Trinity, as well as teaching them. Of course Paul will later add detail about a level of spiritual maturity which must be attained before anyone teaches, but the point here is that all are not only permitted but ordered to do so. Even the simplest newborn believer can pass on the gospel message, since they had to comprehend what they put their faith in.

Acts 2 is where we read of the arrival of the Holy Spirit, and Peter declares it to be at least a partial fulfillment of Joel 2:28-32. It is plainly stated, twice, that both men and women would prophesy, which means to speak with divine inspiration. So even though at that time one could have argued that this only applied to Jews, they could not deny that it applied to women as well as men, meaning women too could speak with divine authority to a mixed crowd. We should also observe that whenever God is doing something new, it is accompanied by miracles as a sign or announcement to verify its origin.

Now look at the description of this “new creation”, the *ekklesia*, at the end of the chapter. First, they were devoted to the teachings of the apostles. While we no longer have them with us, we have their teachings in the form of the NT letters. Second, they were a community. They shared lives and meals, just like family. They did not organize into a corporate hierarchical structure or set up a seminary. They did not erect a temple or craft sacred objects. They did not weave robes or make candles or lay out a calendar. Instead of rituals they had lives to live, and from the quality of those lives, everyone around them knew Who they worshiped. They took care of each other without the need for a managed commune, to the point where there were no poor among them. The temple courts provided a convenient place to gather, but note that these were the outer courts, not inside the temple itself, and it only says that they met. It was not a special meeting place either, because we read that they met in each other's homes every day. That was what Jesus was talking about to the woman at the well. Would Paul later change all of that? We will see. But at the very least, this was the natural condition of the *ekklesia* at its beginning, and it happened without human planning or oversight. It is in such a situation that God, not people, is glorified; it is the ideal.

Then in chapter 4 we see an incredible thing: the religious leaders, knowing that Peter and John had performed a miraculous healing by the power of Jesus, cared more for their own popularity and prestige than repenting of murdering their own Messiah! We think we would never be like that, but what do we see in Christianity today? Scandals, cover-ups, personal jets, gaudy entertainment palaces, political lobbying, slander, and even death threats against anyone who exposes them. We know they understand the gospel, especially since many today argue that such charlatans are not to be opposed as long as they preach the truth. It is no different today than it was with those who crucified Jesus.

After that incident we see once again that the community of believers was exactly that: a community. They did not crumble in the face of opposition; they did not obey their religious leaders and keep silent. Their giving was spontaneous and sincere, uncoerced and generous. But they were as human as the rest of us, and it didn't take long for some to try to keep the outward appearance of spirituality while hiding their sin.

In chapter 5 we meet Ananias and Sapphira. They plotted together to put on a show of generosity while hiding their greed. But of course God is not blind and deaf, and they were confronted, but each separately. Notice that after Peter confronted Ananias, who literally dropped dead, he confronted Sapphira without telling her what had happened to her husband. Nothing was said to her about sharing her husband's guilt or being let off the hook because she was required to do as he said. Instead, she is shown to be held responsible for her own sin. So even in this tragic incident we see proof that a wife is not "covered" by her husband nor held to less responsibility.

Now of course this sort of immediate judgment is not the norm. But being a time of transition and establishment of a new dispensation, we would expect both miracles and little leeway regarding sin. So we must be careful in applying what we read in Acts to the *ekklesia* today. But other things of course have never changed; those with power and position still guard their places jealously, and continue to do so even in the face of overwhelming proof that they are fighting against God Himself.

In time things started to settle down, and the believing community kept growing. But in the process we see in chapter 6 that the unmanaged giving was succumbing to ethnic prejudice, and the need arose to appoint managers. Remember what Jesus said about the greatest being like someone who waits tables? That same Greek word, *diakonon*, is used here of those managers, and also in a little play on words Peter uses when he says, "We have tables to serve already, those of spreading the gospel; we need people to serve literal tables so we can continue in our own work." But note two important things here: this was a specific response to a specific need at a specific time, not the establishment of an office. And not once is this incident ever referenced again in the NT. Paul never connects his instructions about "deacons" with this group. We should also note that the criteria for these managers was basically the same as Paul would specify later, criteria mainly concerned with behavior and spirit. But again, this is never depicted as a permanent office.

In chapter 8 we meet Philip, famous for his encounter with the Ethiopian, after which he was miraculously transported to a distant town. We'll hear more about him—rather his daughters—later. But in Chapter 9 we read of probably the most famous conversion in history: the murderous Pharisee Saul encounters the risen Jesus and becomes Paul, the most prolific writer in the NT. Yet here again we should issue caution in application. Many so-called "pastors" claim a similar "Damascus road experience" as proof of a divine calling. But like Moses and the burning bush, or Philip's miraculous transportation, this dramatic encounter is not the norm, and is never cited as a necessary proof of divine sanction.

Chapter 10 is where Peter begins to lose his mindset of separation as a Jew. The Roman centurion Cornelius summons him to present whatever message God has for him. When the Spirit came upon the non-Jews at the home of Cornelius, no one could deny equal status to them any more. As this event is after the earlier incident of the Greek believers being slighted in the distribution of food, we have another bit of support for the idea that this prejudice had been the cause of that problem. Now it is gone, and we never hear of such an inequity among the believers again.

Yet, amazingly, when the Jewish believers in Jerusalem got wind of this, they were indignant! Chapter 11 shows Peter having to go there to testify of God's hand in this, and the Jewish believers backed down. But the point is that in spite of their having accepted the grace of God through Jesus, it still took extraordinary events and eyewitness testimony to get it through their heads that this good news was for everyone. Yet today, we still see a mindset of separateness, a wish to divide. More about that later.

But there is an interesting use of vocabulary in chapter 12, in the account of the servant who came to the door when Peter, who had been arrested, was miraculously freed and came to a house where believers were meeting. Verse 13 says the servant came to answer the door. The word translated here as "answer" is *hupakouo*, which is almost always translated as "obey" or "submit" in other passages. Its more accurate meaning then is to listen, to pay attention, to heed. Again, more about that later.

In chapter 13 the focus shifts primarily to Saul, now called Paul. The jealous Jews stirred up opposition to him, but notice in verse 50 that the people they stirred up included "God-fearing women of high standing." To today's male supremacists, that phrase is an oxymoron! They teach that for a woman to be considered God-fearing she cannot have anything close to high standing. Notice also that these women are mentioned before "the leading men of the city".

Then in chapter 15 we see the ominous rise of the Judaizers, those who believed Christians had to first become Jews and observe all the Jewish customs. These would prove to be the biggest thorn in Paul's side throughout his years of service. In refuting their claims at the meeting known as The Jerusalem Council, Peter tells them that they must not "put on the necks of Gentiles a yoke that neither we nor our ancestors have been able to bear", because all are saved the same way: by grace. Yet ever since the apostles died we have seen one yoke or another put upon every believer's neck, the yoke of the controllers, the burden of legalism. But in the council's decision, notice that though they were convinced by Peter's argument, they asked for a slight concession to Jewish custom: to abstain from sexual immorality, the meat of strangled animals, and blood. This is hardly a demand for obedience to the Laws of Moses, but merely a request to consider the culture. So where and when a particular cultural consideration is not an issue, neither is the need for believers to defer to it. This is an important principle to remember.

Though they did not specify this particular concession, we see in chapter 16 that Paul deferred to the Jews by having young Timothy, whose mother (not father!) was a Jew, circumcised. Again, this is no example of Paul advocating that Christians observe Jewish law, but only a matter of concession. Paul will elaborate on that issue in the 14th chapter of his letter to the Romans.

It is on this journey to spread the gospel that we see in chapter 13 Paul's encounter with a woman named Lydia. He spoke to a group of women who were gathered at a place of prayer, and one of them was this merchant Lydia— yes, a business woman. She readily accepted the gospel and invited them to stay in her home. Not a peep about asking permission of a man.

But notice that in the subsequent encounter with the jailer Paul does not give a complicated theological speech, but simply says “Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved.” There is no emotional pleading, no demand to confess sins and vow to renounce them, no sermon about the fires of hell, no disclaimer about whether he might not be “elect”. Just believe in Jesus. Of course, as Paul will explain later in his letters, such belief assumes that the person knows who Jesus is, and has some concept of why they need to accept Him. But nothing is said about joining an institution or club or performing rituals, just believe. If Paul could present the gospel so simply, why can’t anyone else seem to do so?

Then notice that following Paul’s release from prison, he and Silas return to the home of Lydia, where other believers were meeting. Again, no mention of a leading man or husband. And in chapter 17 we read of more prominent women coming to salvation. But we also read about the “more noble” Bereans, who did not shrink back from daring to hold teachers responsible for their words. They searched the scriptures to check up on Paul, a practice sadly lacking among most believers today, who have bought the out-of-context lie “Touch not God’s anointed!” All believers, as Peter and John will tell us later, are “anointed”. And at the end of the chapter we see yet another incident of a woman, Damaris, coming to the faith. If non-Jews and women were second-class to Paul, he sure had a strange habit of naming and commending them.

Now to chapter 18 where we first meet the famous couple Priscilla and Aquila, tent makers as was Paul, who were living in Corinth after being chased out of Rome. But before leaving for Ephesus, Paul does something frequently cited as yet another example of continuing to observe Jewish law: he has his hair cut off because of having taken a vow. Yet once again, there is no hint in the context of setting a precedent for all believers, for all time. We must look to Paul’s later writings for doctrine and precedents. This particular event is simply mentioned in passing and is not a prominent feature in the narrative. And remember that Paul wrote many of those letters during these travels, such that if something like this were meant as a law, he would certainly have mentioned them in his letters.

It is here in Ephesus that we meet up with Apollos, whom Priscilla and Aquila invited to their home so they could fill him in on the missing part of his evangelistic message. Again, we see the woman mentioned first and teaching a man in her home. And this man she and her husband taught went out and did something else some think we must not do: vigorous public debate. What a guy!

Then in chapter 19 we see that the word *ekklesia* is used for the assembly of worshippers of Diana (vs. 32). Curious, isn’t it, that no Bibles translate it as “church” here? They typically use assembly, meeting, or even crowd, and this is the case in the half-dozen or so other instances where it’s obviously referring to non-believers. One must ask where the word “church” comes from, and why it would continue to be used in spite of its being an inaccurate translation.

Now in chapter 20 we pick up a phrase Paul uses that sheds a usually overlooked light on his statement in Phil. 3:14 about running the race and winning the prize. Verse 24 identifies exactly what Paul means by that: not salvation, but “the task of testifying to the good news of God’s grace.” Although that isn’t directly related to the

study of what the Bible says about controllers, it does highlight the importance of paying attention to the phrases and habits of NT writers, another important aspect of context.

But in that same passage we do see another statement about the *ekklesia*. Verse 17 tells us that Paul did not send for a “head pastor” to see him off, but “the elders of the *ekklesia*”. This was one community of believers having several elders. Never in scripture do we see any one person as an authority over the group; not even the letters to the seven churches in Revelation are addressed to leaders. And in verse 28 we see an even more important principle: elders or overseers are not owners over the “flock”, because it was bought by Jesus with His own blood. And then Paul gives a prediction that has come true in horrifying intensity: “... after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number some will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them.”

This is the rebuttal to those who argue that if a “church father” lived near the time of the apostles, then they must be more orthodox and trustworthy in their doctrine. But as we have read here, no such guarantee is granted. There were wolves on Paul’s heels while he lived, so we can rest assured that they increased in number and boldness after all the apostles died. Eternal vigilance is required of elders; it has always been required, and all the more as we see the end approaching. Then in verses 33-35 we see yet another principle: Paul was not after anyone’s money and refused to use his right to be supported. This is just another way in which those with privilege show by example that they should lay it down just as Jesus did.

Chapter 21 is where we meet up again with Philip. Verse 8 tells us he was one of the seven, that is, one of those chosen to manage the distribution of food to the Greek widows in Jerusalem, which we read about back in chapter 6. Verse 9 makes a very simple statement: he had four unmarried daughters who prophesied. Excuses and special pleading are typically offered in order to explain away these female prophets, but scripture does not do so. Since, as Paul will explain later, prophecy is a gift of the Holy Spirit, and since those gifts are for the building up of the *ekklesia*, then there is no place outside of that *ekklesia* for these women to prophesy. Never is any spiritual gift given to only half the Body, and never is any meeting of believers called “unofficial”. Efforts to exclude women from some spiritual gifts can be very desperate.

Then we read of another instance of Paul’s concession to the Jews in verses 20-26. As he will tell us in 1 Cor. 9:22, he would do whatever he could to win people over and be at peace with everyone, as much as it depended on him. But in spite of all his bending over backwards to appease the Jews, they still did not listen. In Acts 22:22 they showed their utter disregard for anything else he did or said when he revealed God’s commission for him to go to the Gentiles. Are people today any different? They will accept each other but only as long as a certain set of rules are followed. No matter how well a Christian’s convictions are defended from scripture or the quality of life they have exhibited, they will be thrown overboard at the first expression of having a contrary opinion from that of the group. Nothing has changed.

Through the book of Acts we have seen that many strongly-held convictions are not based upon the examples we can see in scripture, but on hearsay, faulty reasoning, prejudice, and the weight of tradition. People are indeed responsible for thinking and discerning, but woe to those who deceive them and lead them astray! It was never the average person who opposed the gospel, but the powerful and prominent. Yet Christianity has a long history of catering to people of persuasive speech and strong influence. We, like ancient Israel, demand earthly kings and then gladly offer ourselves to them as slaves. But neither we nor they have that right, because we belong to Another, and He will repay those who take His sheep for their own. So we need to practice patience, discernment, and careful analysis if we want to keep the wheat and throw away the chaff.

One quick word about the argument that without an earthly king or priest there would be chaos: Nonsense. We have the Spirit, and we have the Word. If these cannot be trusted to direct the community of believers, then no amount of external control will help. In fact, it will only establish an institution with a life of its own, a life not derived from the Vine. Like a family, there are “parents” and “children”, but in a healthy family the children eventually grow up and may become parents themselves. There are “teachers” and “students”, but if the students never graduate there is something terribly wrong with the school. And a healthy Body has only one Head, one Source, and all the parts report to the Head, not each other. Paul will elaborate on that later. We need no king or priest over us.

The Teachings, Part One

We have now finished laying the foundation of all that the NT writers will refer to when making a case for any given principle. We had to know, to the best of our ability, what the recipients of those letters would have understood about the scriptures they had, and the events they learned about as a result of the twelve apostles' witnessing. The apostles will add no new interpretations (but certainly some new applications), because they are using what is already there.

Let us begin with what is believed to be the earliest of the apostolic writings, the book of James. It is a very practical, non-theological letter, a charge to individuals to examine their own behavior. Many have mistaken it for a weapon to use on other believers who do not have exactly the same package of personal convictions, or a doctrinal thesis on what it takes to be saved. But remember that this is the same James who led the Jerusalem Council, who added no requirements to salvation by faith and only asked for some minor concessions to Judaism. His message in this letter is a plea for consistency with that simple faith, an urging to think things through. They had to un-learn things like fawning over the rich and despising the poor. Note that in those particular instructions (James 2:2) he only mentions "meetings", not "services" or anything like that. And his simple definition of pure religion was also very practical: "... to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world (James 1:27)." We need to remember that it is in this practical theme that he discusses faith and deeds.

But aside from ignoring the context, the most critical part of this letter that is typically ignored is the reference to teachers (James 3:1). They are to be held to a higher standard, not a lower one. Yet how many more scandals will it take for us to grasp this principle? We put leaders up on pedestals and excuse their sins. We fawn over them while tolerating the most vile behavior and false teachings. We need to stop following anyone who acts in ways that are clearly un-Christlike, beginning with the issue of pride, and we need to start holding them to their claims of spiritual maturity.

Now to Peter, whose tone in his writings is much different than the personality traits typically assigned to him by many commentators. But of course it is fitting that the one whose name means "stone" would describe us all as living stones (1 Peter 2:4-5) comprising a spiritual house. But he also calls us "a royal priesthood". Every believer is a priest! There is no special "clergy", no earthly intermediary between ourselves and our Savior. He even repeats this in verse 9 to emphasize the point.

"But," some will object, "starting in 1 Peter 2:13 he tells us to submit to the authorities." But Peter never mentions spiritual leaders there. He is talking about Christians being model citizens so that unbelievers will have no grounds for maligning the name of Jesus. While this does begin a passage on the topic of what is typically translated "submission", this injunction to honor authority is not tied to any sort of hierarchy among believers, but only on how believers must behave in society.

After that Peter addresses slaves, but as we've already discussed, this is no endorsement of slavery but an instruction on how to behave as believers in this situation. So why is it, then, that when the topic shifts to women a few verses later, somehow this is treated differently by many teachers and commentators? If Peter did not endorse slavery by telling Christian slaves how to behave, then he is not endorsing male supremacy by telling Christian women how to behave. Both issues are very much a matter of considering society; this important aspect of context cannot be dismissed on a whim. Note in 1 Peter 3:3 that he uses terminology Paul will later use: "Wives, in the same way submit yourselves to your own husbands." Please see the later discussion on the significance of "own" under the writings of Paul.

But what of the word translated "submit yourselves"? This Greek word, *hupotasso*, is in the passive voice and therefore means "to be attached to, to be a support of", as in supporting documentation for a legal claim. It certainly does not mean "to obey". This same word was used earlier for slaves as well, and also for believers under civil government, both radical ideas for that culture. And note that this is only part of a sentence; Peter gives us the scope of this teaching: "**so that, if any of them do not believe** the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives" (emphasis mine). We see that this is no blank check for Christian husbands to have the last word over their wives, but for Christian women married to unbelieving men to be extra careful about how they "witness" without words, since their options were severely limited. Unbelieving men were considered owners of their wives, another detail we must leave for later discussion. But the point here is that this has to do with believing wives witnessing to their unbelieving husbands.

Peter then continues with this instruction to believing wives of unbelieving husbands, telling them to emphasize the inner person instead of outward beauty. In the culture of the time, women were thought to be devoid of such character. He appeals to the depth of character of Hebrew women of old, who were likewise seen to *hupotasso* their husbands. Christian women are to have that same inner strength and dignity, regardless of the culture. Sadly though, today we see not only Christian women held in the same degree of contempt as did the unbelievers of the first century, but that Christian men are being told to emphasize the external, dressing in certain ways and acting more like the ancient barbarians than the holy men of old. This new emphasis on the flesh is a giant step backwards, a move away from the teachings of the apostles.

But again, betraying their jealous grip on male supremacism, some will point eagerly to 1 Peter 3:6 and say "See? Sarah called Abraham her master!" But the only recorded instance where she used that term for her husband was when she used it in derision, in Gen. 18:12, where she thought to herself, "After I am worn out and my lord is old, will I now have this pleasure?" In Gen. 16:5 she clearly stood up to Abraham and called God as a witness between the two of them. And we can't forget that Abraham had tried on two occasions to pass her off as his sister (Gen. 12:12-13, 20:2). So what point is Peter making here, as we remember the principle of not adding to the scriptures in order to support an argument? Peter explains in the next sentence: Christian women are like Sarah when they do what is right and do not give in to fear. Sarah clearly had no fear of Abraham, social norms notwithstanding.

Now when Peter addresses believing husbands he begins with “Likewise”. This is mutuality; this is reciprocity. A husband and wife are to be considerate of each other, but the husband, because of his social privileges at the time, had the greater charge to be considerate, since women of the time had “the less stable income”. The term translated “weaker vessel” is inaccurate; the two Greek words used together, *asthenes skeuos*, form an idiom meaning one who is in a disadvantaged position to support themselves financially. We have confirmation of this in Peter’s own words following, when he states that Christian husbands must treat their wives with respect “as heirs with you”; it is actually a play on words as well. And that word translated “respect” has the literal meaning of a treasure, something highly valued and honored. So the Christian husband is to honor and value his wife, lifting her up and seeing to it that she is not harmed or belittled by a society that gives men all the rights. Yet now, many are seeking to hand those exclusive rights back to Christian men and take them from Christian women, thus “bowing to culture”; that this culture is ancient and has been the norm for most of history does not make it any less true. Finally, Peter gives men added incentive to go against their culture: God will cover His ears and refuse to hear the prayers of men who fail to treat their wives properly (the Greek word literally means “to block”; Peter is not saying the husband’s prayers will merely be unheard, but that God will oppose them)! To emphasize: Peter is not just saying that men must not abuse their wives, but that they must also honor them and be at one with them.

Then at the end of chapter 3 Peter talks about Jesus having gone to make a proclamation to those who had died in the Flood. There is much in that passage to discuss, but I want to focus on that which concerns the topic of this book, and the issue of water baptism is certainly a divisive issue among believers. But in verse 21 Peter states in the clearest possible terms that such physical immersion (the literal Greek meaning) is **not** “what now saves you also”. Salvation is only in faith in the literal, physical resurrection of Jesus from the dead. And in the last verse we see once again the word *hupotasso* in the passive voice, regarding how “angels, authorities, and powers” relate to Jesus. Some see a chain of command at every turn, but the Greek grammar does not allow it.

In 1 Peter 4:10 he makes a statement about spiritual gifts: they are to be used to serve others. Nothing is said about which gifts are for which groups of people, or that some people can only use their gifts for a restricted subset of believers. We are to be “stewards of God’s grace”, and a steward must be faithful in those things they have been entrusted with. To tell some believers (women) that they cannot have certain spiritual gifts, or that their gifts are only for other women, is to bind and restrict the Holy Spirit.

In chapter five Peter address elders. The Greek word is *presbuterous*, but use caution in applying some kind of official meaning to the word. Its counterpart is found in verse 5 and is the word *neoterou*, translated “young ones”; the two are related in this context. And if the second term is not a special group but a general term for the young, then there is no contextual warrant for assigning special status to the first term either. Peter was likely advanced in years at this time (the letter was written in the early 60s A.D.) and thus an elder in the normal sense of the word.

Yet Peter does tell these people to watch over the flock. But note that this flock belongs to God, not to them, and that they are to watch willingly and without desire for making a profit. This is not, as has been practiced for centuries, a career! It is a service, and a noble one. But more importantly, Peter commands them this: “not lording it over those entrusted to your care, but being examples to the flock.” The elders are not to boss or command; their leadership is to come solely from the examples they set to others. This reinforces our earlier discussion concerning James, about not excusing the sins of leaders but holding them to a higher standard. This is no chain of command but leadership by drawing, by example, by service. The sheep are not to follow the selfish “vision” of a CEO known as a “pastor” but to know the voice of their Master and follow those who have that same voice or example.

So it is the “young ones” who follow the elders, who by their examples show themselves to be proper guides and not overlords or would-be intermediaries or hired hands. And there we see that word *hupotasso* again, describing the relationship of the young to the old. And in case the elders missed it somehow, Peter makes sure everyone is covered in humility, not just the young.

We can deduce from all this that the elders are the experienced, the wise, the tested and approved, while the young are those who are still working toward that state. The context supports both the literal meaning of old and young, and the meaning of experience versus inexperience. As Paul will tell us later, no new believer is to be recognized as an elder because of the danger of conceit, and that those who ignore this warning will be held responsible for what those inexperienced ones may teach. Yet we see this grave blunder repeated endlessly. Young men are sent to seminary on the basis of an alleged calling that is somehow different from anyone else’s, and upon graduation are deemed Pastors or Bishops or some other titles of un-Biblical offices. The young can even be found teaching classes for senior citizens! This must stop.

In his second letter Peter mainly warns against false teachers, and note that the emphasis is not on exactly what they teach but how they live. It should go without saying that whatever is not in agreement with the teachings of the apostles is therefore false, such that listing specific falsehoods would be unnecessary. But it should be no different for us today. We have the true teachings in the NT, and we have several lists of behaviors that identify false teachers. We need to insist that both correct teaching and correct behavior are evident before listening to any given teacher. The two must be present together; doctrine alone is cold and lifeless, while external behavior and feeling alone is vulnerable to every idea that sounds good. But together they are a strong defense. And no believer is exempt from Peter’s many warnings about how we all should live.

In chapter three Peter makes what must be the greatest understatement in scripture since “And [God] made the stars also” (Gen. 1:16): he tells us that Paul’s writings are hard to understand (2 Peter 3:16)! But in all seriousness, shouldn’t this be a rebuttal to the “plain reading” defense for those who think everything Paul wrote is crystal clear and not possible to misunderstand? And if it was difficult for people of the day, speaking the same language, knowing the culture, then we must face the fact that it will require diligence on our part to properly understand Paul’s writings. And Peter does equate those writings with the OT scriptures, citing the fact that “ignorant and

unstable people distort” Paul’s writings “as they do the **other** scriptures” (emphasis mine). Note also the strong terms Peter uses to describe those people. Today we are effectively gagged from using such speech because it is declared to be too divisive and negative.

If anyone could have pulled rank, set up religious practices, or claimed some special title, it would have been Peter. Yet he did no such thing; neither did James, who only called himself a servant of Jesus though he was physically His half-brother. Humility and leadership by example were the hallmarks of the NT writers, no matter how close they had been to Jesus in this life. Yet through history we have seen believers set themselves over others and construct various buildings and systems which more resemble a business or political party, with their chains of command and micromanagement. Coercion, not example, has been the primary glue holding these institutions together. Now this is not to say that all the people, having known no other way, have been deliberately and knowingly engaging in something un-Biblical. No, the blame goes to those who teach and perpetuate such things, since they claim to know the scriptures. Just as Jesus took the Pharisees’ claim to having sight as their condemnation (John 9:41), so also will God hold responsible all those who are esteemed as teachers and theologians for anything not in accordance with the teachings of the apostles, and of course the Lord Jesus’ own words and example. If they want the recognition, they must take the blame.

The Teachings, Part Two

Before we focus on the teachings of Paul we need to address some of those by John and then the writer of Hebrews.

In John's second letter, he addresses it to someone typically translated as "the chosen lady". Some commentators believe the word for "lady" is a proper name and transliterate it as Kuria, but to my knowledge there is no historical basis for this. The Greek word is from the same base as that translated "lord" whenever it is in the male form, per Strong's:

- 2959 Kuria koo-ree'-ah feminine of kurioV– kurios 2962; Cyria, a Christian woman; lady
- 2960 kuriakos koo-ree-ak-os' from kurioV– kurios 2962; belonging to the Lord (Jehovah or Jesus); Master's
- 2961 kurieuo ko-ree-yoo'-o from kurioV– kurios 2962; to rule; have dominion over, lord, be lord of, exercise lordship over
- 2962 kurios koo'-ree-os from kuros (supremacy)– supreme in authority, i.e. (as noun) controller; by implication, Master (as a respectful); God, Lord, master, Sir
- 2963 kuriotes koo-ree-ot'-ace from kurioV– kurios 2962; mastery, i.e. (concretely and collectively) rulers; dominion, government
- 2964 kuroo koo-ro'-o from the same as kurioV– kurios 2962; to make authoritative, i.e. ratify; confirm

Note that the word is not used exclusively of Jesus: it is a verb in Mt. 20:25 (to lord over), used in ref. to Abraham in 1 Peter 3:6, and translated as "master" in many places such as Mt. 10:24 and Rev. 19:16. I point this out as a rebuttal to the argument that *kurios* is never to be used for ordinary people. But this letter is the only place where the grammatical feminine is used (vs. 1 and 5). So there is no other context to check, in the Bible or in secular literature, that would allow us to translate this instance in a radically different way than when the masculine form is used. So as we examine the Strong's references above, we see what is obviously an arbitrary assignment of a foreign meaning to the Greek word. This is an example of inconsistency at the very least, and likely prejudice. That Christendom has permitted such sophistry for many generations is an indictment upon our willingness to alter scripture for our own ends. It therefore casts a shadow of distrust over those who produce dictionaries for translation, since if they are capable of such things here, what else has been deliberately altered?

With the accurate and faithful rendering of this word as "lord" or "master", we see that it fits the context of a letter written to the leader of a congregation of believers. Had John been writing to a personal friend and family he would certainly have addressed it to the man. The content of the letter is gentle encouragement and praise for someone who is leading and protecting, since in verse 8 he warns against false teachers, something an elder or guardian would be charged with. He further

warns against inviting **into her home** anyone who brought a false teaching. It is known that the early believers met in homes, and it is possible that at least some of these were the homes of elders. So it makes perfect sense to understand that John is writing to such an elder in this case. And as we've already seen, this woman was not the first to have the *ekklesia* meeting in her home; see Lydia (Acts 16), Chloe (1 Cor. 1), Nympha (Col. 4).

Interestingly, John's third letter which is addressed to a man is more about acts of individual kindness, something usually downplayed for females as not signifying any sort of authority or office. Yet this man was charged with seeing to it that missionaries were not sent out empty-handed (vs. 6). Still, the most influential and powerful person in that congregation was one Diotrephes, since he had the power to throw people out of their fellowship (vs. 9 and 10). Note that this Diotrephes is proud and defiant, acting in ways contrary to the examples of the apostles and out of character with the law of love, even engaging in gossip. This sounds exactly like many Christian leaders today. But more importantly, no such group was to have one person in charge. Jesus said to take matters to the entire congregation if going to them personally didn't work, and Paul only mentioned the whole group when dealing with the man sinning with his stepmother (Mt. 18:17, 1 Cor. 5:4). So no individual should ever have such control.

Now to Hebrews. The author is unknown but there are clues that give us some confidence in ruling out various possible candidates. It is the only letter that mentions Timothy in prison (13:23), and Paul never spoke of this. In 2:3 the writer(s) (Heb. 5:11, 6:9, 8:1 etc. use "we", but 11:32 uses "I") say they had not heard Jesus personally, which also would not be true of Paul. And Paul was in the habit of signing his letters, especially to guard against forgery (2 Thes. 2:2). As for other candidates such as Apollos (educated), Barnabas (a Levite), Luke (educated), and Clement of Rome, there would be no reason for them to hide their identity. And that this writer's identity seems to have been deliberately concealed is an important clue as well. Prof. Adolph Von Harnack in 1900 stated his research suggested that the identity of the writer of Hebrews was deliberately hidden (*Probabilia über die Adresse und den Verfasser des Habraerbriefes*, E. Preuschen, Berlin: Forschungen und Fortschritte, 1900).

This time in history saw the rise of persecution against believers, and women were especially vulnerable. But this was also a patriarchal society which would have balked at written teachings from a woman. Even assuming a male author this letter was only reluctantly recognized as part of the canon of scripture, yet God saw to it that it was preserved for us. And as we will learn more about when we come to the letters of Paul, there were women he worked with as equals, one even being entrusted with delivering his letter to the Romans. So all things considered, a female author is certainly plausible.

So who was the likely author? Again referencing the previous footnote, the conclusion Prof. Von Harnack reached was that the author was likely Priscilla:

- The end of ch. 13 shows that the letter was written by someone at least on a par with Timothy (see Rom. 16:3 where she is called a co-worker)
- The *ekklesia* met in her house (1 Cor. 16:19)

- She and her husband taught the educated and intelligent Apollos (Acts 18)

Some cite the masculine pronoun “he” that goes with the verb “to relate” in 11:32 as proof of male authorship, but who would make the same argument for female authorship based upon a single pronoun, especially in such a long letter? So although no scholar today claims to know for certain who wrote Hebrews, there is no reason to reject Priscilla or any other woman as one of the candidates.

The bulk of the letter concerns the superiority of the priesthood of Jesus over that of Levi and Aaron. Many references are made to the contrasts between the two, but the most critical component of all is found in 7:12, which says, “For when the priesthood is changed, the law must be changed also.” Even while the apostles lived there was relentless effort to keep Christians under Jewish law, whether they had formerly been Jews or not. Yet as the writer of Hebrews points out, Jesus is our new High Priest of a new contract or covenant, and it is not possible to keep a law without its priesthood. This is what Jesus was referring to in His illustration of the wineskins (Luke 5:37); the old and the new cannot be mixed. So any teaching or movement which seeks to put Christians under the laws of the old Jewish priesthood is in violation of this teaching. And we will examine the charge of this granting “a license to sin” when we study Paul’s writings.

Hebrews 10:25 is held up as an order to attend “church services”, but look at the context. It begins in vs. 19 with an appeal to this new priesthood as the basis for confidence in approaching God, because our sins have been cleansed. It is followed by a call to a strong grip on hope, because the One making the promises is faithful. Then people are charged with finding ways to encourage each other to love and act upon that love, and verse 25 follows as part of that same sentence. Lastly, the motivation for these gatherings is the lateness of the hour, an appeal to urgency because our time here is short.

There is no reference here to formal services or even the worship of God, but simply that we should get together to share our spiritual and physical gifts with other believers, building them up. And truth to tell, little gift sharing and building up happens in the typical “church service” or even Sunday School. Most believers sit passively and contribute little more than money, and rarely have even the opportunity to share person-to-person; most of that sort of thing happens outside of formal services. We should also note that throughout this letter, all aspects of the temple of Jesus’ new priesthood are in heaven, not on earth. The NT is devoid of any hint at the construction of houses of worship for Christians, as mentioned earlier concerning Jesus’ statements to the Samaritan woman at the well. All discussion here in Hebrews is about ways in which the old earthly temple and its practices were shadows or symbols of the heavenly one.

In fact, I would be so bold as to say that having our own unauthorized temples is probably insulting to the priesthood of Jesus, especially the presence of altars within them. Jesus is our Sacrifice; if the symbol of the cross is to remain empty to signify His resurrection, then altars should be left empty as well, if we have them at all. Yet we are told that “the church” is the temple or “storehouse”, though no NT writer or Jesus ever says so, and we place offerings on our altars, as though Jesus is an insufficient one. We burn candles like the pagan religions do, we have raised

platforms like the ancient Greek and Roman temples had, and we make religious garb for our public orators as if we are under Jewish law.

While I know that most people value all these things and can't imagine being able to properly worship God without them, it is time for us all to re-read Hebrews, and of course all the Letters, and ask ourselves what we really mean by the ways in which we practice Christianity. How does it glorify God to set up symbols that present the sacrifice and priesthood of Jesus as inadequate? How does a business model with layers of management represent the Body of Christ? How does theater seating, facing all one direction, facilitate the sharing of each of our gifts with others? And what kind of school rarely produces a graduate, or has the young teaching the old?

Now to chapter 13, which contains two references to leaders that are often translated so as to convey the idea of obedience to authorities. The literal rendering of verse 7 is this:

remember the ones-leading you who speak to-you the word of-the-God of-whom
contemplating the result of-the behavior imitate the faith

(words connected by dashes indicate a single Greek word)

It tells us to focus on those who teach us and imitate their example and faith. There are no words meaning authority over or ruling, or anything close to that. And verse 17 is similar:

be-persuaded to-the ones-leading you and be-deferring they for are-being-
vigilant over the souls of-you as account having-to-render that with joy this they-
may-do and no ones-groaning disadvantageous for to-you this-is.

Watching over someone is not at all the same as being their boss. We are told here to defer to those that guard us from error, because guardians will be held responsible for protecting those in their care. And again, the guards on the walls are not the magistrates! Their responsibilities have no connection with authority over those they guard. But it is wise to take their advice and listen to their teachings. This is a plea for cooperation, not a command to obey the decrees of a ruler, regardless of how benevolently one might rule.

Up to this point we have examined the teachings of everyone but Paul as they relate to the matter of power and control in Christianity, and we have not seen anything resembling that which has been practiced throughout the history of the *ekklesia*. The NT teaches mutual submission, deference to the wise, an internal spirituality that requires no props, a community of people who build each other up and unify around the teachings of the apostles, and a consideration of culture without compromising essential tenets of our faith. There is no talk of buildings or sacred objects, no layers of management, no rituals or liturgies or holy days. All we see is unity in the Spirit, love from the heart, diligence in doctrine, and leadership by example. And as I hope we have learned by now, the absence of something in scripture is not to be taken as tacit approval, such that all these external things would be sanctioned by God. But ponder this question: how are all these things different from the other religions and their ways?

The Teachings, Part Three

More than half the NT letters were written by Paul, the former Pharisee and the only one besides the twelve that Jesus taught personally, by revelation (Gal. 1:11-12). Since **when** Paul wrote is as much a part of context as **what**, I will go through his letters in chronological order.

The first letter Paul wrote was to the Galatians, around 48 AD. But already the believers had been turned aside to false teachings, and from the content we can see that it had to do with pressure to conform to Judaism. Chapter two is where we read of Paul's famous public rebuke of Peter for caving in to them, and in doing so Paul forcefully draws the line between salvation and legalism. Yet in spite of this, it seems that most of the divisions believers have experienced through history have not been over whether there should be legalism, but how much or what kind.

It defies all reason that so many believers can read this letter, especially chapter three, and still not get the point Paul is making, no matter how many times they may read it. He explains that from Israel's history we can see the sharp divide between the Promise to Abraham and the Law to come 430 years later. One did not negate the other, but both were true and binding. However, the two cannot be mixed because a contract between two parties and witnessed by a mediator is completely separate from a promise made by One. The Promise long predated the Law, but the purpose of Law was to serve as a temporary restrainer of sin until the time to fulfill the Promise had come.

And how much more plainly could Paul have put it than he did in verse 28, that the old ways are finished? These three pairings— Jew/Gentile, slave/free, male/female— exactly parallel a rabbinical prayer that said, “Thank God that I was not born a Gentile, a slave, or a woman” (Talmud, Menahoth 43b-44a). Paul, trained as a Pharisee, is turning privilege and separateness on its head, defying not only ethnic privilege but also slavery and male supremacism in one stroke. This is every bit a part of the context of the purpose and limited scope of the Law, which never replaced the Promise, and was completely met in Jesus the Messiah.

I should stop and point out something that frequently goes unnoticed: Gentiles were **never** under the Law! We tend to forget that all of the OT was for the Jews, as well as a significant part of the NT, because the first believers were all Jews. They were the ones who needed to be taught the difference between Law and Promise, and they would naturally be the ones having the most difficulty leaving it behind. And this is why it was so critical to immediately squash the attempt to make Christians first become Jews, and why it was a problem throughout Paul's life as a believer.

In chapter four Paul points out one of the reasons Jesus came: to “redeem those under the law”, to adopt them as children with full rights of inheritance. Yet this adoption is not limited to those who had been under the Law; as Paul said, all who have the faith of Abraham are his descendents, spiritually speaking. But again, this refers not to the Law but to the Promise.

After saying all that, Paul asks with great exasperation how anyone could want to go back to a system of slavery and bondage, treating their adoption as worthless. He mentions the observation of a sacred calendar as part of that slavery. Now as we will read in Romans 14, Paul is hardly making a ban on such a thing; rather, he is saying that they have enslaved themselves to it. Any system which becomes such a burden has crossed the line from individual conscience to legalism. Remember that Jesus even said “the Sabbath was made for people, not people for the Sabbath” (Mark 2:27).

Paul’s statement in verse 16 has become the lament of any who dare to question those in control today: “Have I now become your enemy by telling you the truth?” The context of this letter is one of strong criticism, and Paul could be very crude and sarcastic at times. But it is being done to combat falsehood, and this is a vital point to remember. While criticism of fellow believers should not be the defining characteristic of our lives, there are times when it must be done, and we dare not attempt to silence those who do so. Satan has deceived us into thinking it is better to keep our “swords” clean and shiny in their sheaths than to get them dirty by actually using them! And there is no better reason to use them than to drive away the wolves who would devour the flock from within.

I pray that Paul’s opening statement of chapter 5 becomes the rallying cry of a revolution in Christianity: “Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.” And he goes on to make a strong rebuttal against an idea that has held sway for many generations, really since the apostles died: that we are under certain parts of the old Law. Remember that we Gentiles were never under it to begin with, but somehow people think we should all be held to the parts they have decided must still apply. Not only is such a distinction absent from scripture, but Paul points out that it is utterly impossible to only keep part of the Law; it’s all or nothing. And he calls it “falling away from grace” when people try to justify themselves by keeping the Law. Of course certain things are intrinsic to the nature of God and will never change, such as not lying, stealing, murdering, etc. But the only law for Christians is love, because “love covers over a multitude of sins” and “Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law” (1 Peter 4:8, Rom. 13:10). So let us stop trying to enforce compliance with that which has been replaced by Jesus.

But some will object, “Jesus said He did not come to abolish the Law” (Mt. 5:17). Yes, and then He said that He came to fulfill it. If you fulfill a contract it is no longer in effect. Also, remember what we learned in Hebrews about law and priesthood, and we will learn more from Paul. And again, it cannot be overemphasized that Gentiles were never under the old Law at all. Then of course Paul points out an obvious proof of his not teaching compliance with the Law: he is being persecuted for that very reason. His greatest enemies were always the Jews who insisted on putting Christians into bondage. There was no need for Jesus to die to free people from the Law if that Law must still be obeyed.

Now Paul brings balance to his strong argument against legalism, to counter the often-made charge that “antinomianism” (being without law) is a “license to sin”. He states point blank in Gal. 5:13 that our freedom in Jesus is not **to** sin but **from** sin. This is how we obey the law of love, which “does no harm to its neighbor”, and how

we show that we belong to Jesus. The spirit and the flesh are in a constant state of war within us, and we have to know which side we're on! And again he states that the spirit and the law are mutually exclusive. If, as Paul says, we have indeed "crucified the flesh" then we will not indulge its desires. If this earns us the epithet "antinomian", then we who side with Paul should wear the label with honor.

In chapter six Paul brings up another common problem in Christianity: thinking ourselves to be righteous in comparison to others. But humanity is not the standard, and if none of us reach the perfect standard only Jesus could reach, then we must not "shoot our wounded" by despising others for not being as far along on the scale of spiritual maturity as we think we are. What kind of army beats its own wounded? What kind of body neglects or mistreats its own wounds? Then what kind of Christianity is it that looks down on the backslidden or cuts down the less mature? Is it not the ones doing the cutting that show their true state of immaturity and worldliness? Paul will elaborate on that in his letters to the Corinthians.

Finally, Paul points out that the ones who shout the loudest that we should go under Law are typically the worst violators of it. It would be far better for such people to heed Paul's teachings on all this, and ask themselves how they exhibit the love of Jesus when they destroy others for whom He died and adopted by their faith. We need more speeches on hypocrisy and less on "touch not God's anointed".

The next two letters Paul wrote were to the Thessalonians. And like the one to the Galatians, he addresses them to the entire community of believers, not an individual elder or even a group of elders. We should also note that most such letters were intended to be read aloud due to illiteracy and the cost of materials. One aspect of context which we simply cannot recover is the exact pronunciation of the koine (common) Greek, and this can sometimes have bearing on our understanding, or at least tip us off to some plays on words. Even today in our own languages we recognize the limitations of written words as opposed to the many aspects of communication present when speaking fact-to-face. And if we have such difficulties communicating with people in front of us, in our language and culture, then surely we can appreciate the difficulty in truly grasping all that was originally conveyed by those who wrote down the words of scripture. That is why an approach to Bible study that only skims the surface (the "plain reading" method) is very limited and can lead to serious misunderstanding. Even if it worked, I have never seen this method applied consistently but only used when it suits the interpreter.

In 1 Thes. 2:6 Paul states an important principle: "We were not looking for praise from any human being, not from you or anyone else, even though as apostles of Christ we could have asserted our prerogatives." This again is following the example of Jesus in laying down privilege and taking on the role of a servant. Any Christian who seeks to rule has not even begun to grasp what Jesus modeled for us all, without exception, and certainly without respect to race, class, or sex, which are all matters of the flesh. Notice also that Paul likens the function of Christian leaders with that of a mother caring for her children. This is so radically opposite the current movement toward the "alpha male pastor"! And it extended even to the point of not demanding a salary, just as no mother would expect her children to see to her needs.

Chapter three begins with Paul calling Timothy his co-worker. Again Paul does not pull rank or consider Timothy beneath him. In 1 Thes. 5:13 he, like the writer of Hebrews, talks about the way to treat those that instruct and warn us. They are described with the Greek word *proistemi*, which while including the possible meaning of ruling, also includes the care and protection of others. But Paul's context is that these people are recognized as those who work for their benefit, and they should be held in high esteem, out of gratitude and wisdom and not out of obligation or fear. The over-arching principles of Christian love and the example of Jesus should always keep us from injecting hierarchy between believers.

The second letter to the Thessalonians begins with Paul encouraging them in their suffering, but then in chapter two he has to deal with the problem of forgeries being spread in his name. And the fake messages that were causing them such alarm are identical to some being spread today, namely, that the Tribulation has already begun. But the important point for this book's topic is that Paul always signed his letters, a matter we examined concerning the author of Hebrews. So Paul assures the people that the alarming messages are not true, and that they must hold tightly to what he had taught them as a way to guard against being vulnerable to such things.

It is in chapter three that Paul emphasizes the need for believers to be responsible people, and he led by example by working to provide for himself rather than accept support from those he served. He laid down his rights as an apostle in order to model what he was teaching them. This is how all Christian leaders must act.

Next we come to Paul's letters to the Corinthians, where we see a more fully developed body of teachings, born of problems arising in the passage of time and the change of the *ekklesia* from primarily Jewish to more non-Jewish influence. Now there were more falsehoods to combat than just Jewish legalism. But Paul always begins with the positive, and with the foundation of salvation. For all the criticism to follow, he still describes them as being in Jesus, as not lacking any spiritual gift, and as being kept safe to the end by Jesus Himself. It is the faithfulness of God, not of us, that will accomplish this. So what Paul is about to say to them, he will say to believers; this is the greater context of the letter and will help us to avoid taking some of Paul's statements to mean what they don't.

Why is it that Paul speaks of the reports of problems coming from members of "Chloe's household"? Remembering that the believers met in homes, we can deduce that the Corinthian believers met in the home of Chloe (a woman) and that she was probably an elder in that congregation. Otherwise we would have had the names of elders instead, had they been considered "in charge" and that the homeowner was of no rank or authority. It would then be strange indeed for Paul to name the homeowner and not any of the elders.

And the content of the report is first of all that factions have formed around prominent persons. But Paul could still confront Christians today with the very same rhetorical questions as he put to the Corinthians: Is Christ divided? Did anyone but Jesus die for you? We are deservedly known by outsiders as a religion of many divisions, all because we can't seem to keep our eyes only on Jesus (Mt. 14:30).

Paul's statement about baptism (*baptidzo*, lit. "to dip or immerse"), that is, the common practice of being immersed in water as a religious or political identification rite, is very telling as well. For someone commissioned by Jesus Himself to preach the gospel, to say he was thankful to God for not having performed this rite surely refutes the argument that such a ritual is even "a believer's first act of obedience" as the saying goes, let alone a requirement for salvation (Some map water baptism to the OT Law, claiming it is the NT version of circumcision. Aside from there being not one hint of such a connection in the Bible, circumcision only applied to males. And if Paul continually condemned attempts to force circumcision on believers, surely he would have the same attitude toward a requirement of water baptism or anything else besides faith.). And as if to emphasize the point, Paul repeats in vs. 17 that, in spite of the Great Commission, he was not sent to baptize, but to preach the gospel. It could not be stated any more plainly that water baptism is not part of the gospel.

In that same sentence Paul also says that polished speaking is something that would rob the cross of its power. Yet in the tradition of ancient Greece and Rome, Christianity has centered around exactly that. Seminary students are trained in public speaking, in following a 3-point outline, in manipulating a crowd with forceful oratory. It draws attention to the speaker and away from the cross of Jesus, per Paul's explicit declaration. As he will say later, there is a time and place for discussing the deeper things of God, but it should never be used as bait to get confessions out of people or a substitution for the power that raised Jesus from the dead. Who really gets the glory out of all those Sunday sermons? Who do the people come to hear? Would they still come without the speech, the music, or the program? As for Paul's following comments on "the foolishness of preaching", the phrase in Greek is literally "the proclamation". It most certainly does not refer to Sunday sermons but to the message of the gospel, which every believer is capable of giving.

After that he points out what we learned in our study of the OT: God's way is not the world's way, which honors the powerful and sophisticated. Instead, He "chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things— and the things that are not— to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him." This point continues into chapter two, wherein Paul reminds them of his own example of humility and fear when he first brought them the gospel, the simple message of the cross. This hardly means we must never discuss anything else, but that the gospel itself must be presented simply and humbly, so that it will clearly be the power of God that saves, and not human effort.

Now in chapter three Paul gets into the matter of spiritual maturity, picking up on his prior statement about the wisdom of God being for the mature. Remember that these are believers, people whose salvation is not questioned by Paul. Yet the people are still infantile in the faith, unable to digest spiritual meat, their worldly behavior being proof of that. And in addressing this problem, Paul again does everything possible to keep people from putting him or anyone else but Jesus on a pedestal. We are all servants, from the immature to the wise, and we each have our own job to do. But like the Corinthians, most Christians have been more concerned about what everybody else is doing.

When Paul speaks of building on the foundation he laid, he is talking about the gospel, about Jesus Himself. But even when the right foundation is laid, we all have to build upon it carefully, meaning we must know what scripture teaches— and what it does not. The illustration of the building tested with fire could symbolize our individual works, but it could also symbolize the doctrines given by teachers. Regardless, the important point there is that in spite of immaturity people can still be saved, even if it means they had no visible or genuine works at all. Certainly any believers who refuse to accept instruction or consistently fail to exhibit basic spiritual “fruit” should be strongly cautioned and only reluctantly expelled from fellowship, but we must not presume that such things are proof of unbelief. If what Paul says to the Corinthians is said to believers, then we need to be very careful.

But why does Paul pick this point in his letter to say that we are all God’s temple, and that anyone who destroys that temple will be destroyed? In context, we could surmise that Paul is referring again to how we build on the foundation, and that if anyone tries to knock that building down, they will suffer the wrath of God. This could refer to false teachings or various divisions that tear people down and wear away at their faith. Those who would try to interfere with the spiritual gifts of others, or make up rules to enslave them, would certainly fit the description of such a destroyer of God’s temple. At the very least, Paul is telling us that every believer is a part of that temple, so every believer is sacred to God; there are no bricks in that temple that are better than the others or more deserving of praise.

Finally at the end of chapter three, Paul just says “Stop this fawning over people! You all belong to God through Christ, so get over yourselves!” And into chapter four then, he continues to repeat that not even he and his co-workers are to be regarded as anything but fellow servants as well. And once again he holds them up as examples to follow, not like the Pharisees whom Jesus told His disciples to only “do what they say, not what they do.”

At the end of that chapter Paul begins to move to the topic of boastful people who are calling him a paper tiger, as if he is only being brave and strong from a safe distance. But after reminding them that they owed him something he warns them against underestimating him. Though he had come to them initially with humility, that will not be the case this time, if he has to come and discipline them. And what gives Paul the authority to administer this discipline? The truth, the gospel. He never claimed authority of his own, but always pointed to the power of the risen Jesus and the scriptures. Every believer has this power as well, because it never comes from us. So there is to be no hiding behind a position or rank to escape God’s discipline, no matter which vessel He chooses to bring it in. Every believer has both the right and the duty to confront falsehood, provided they know the scriptures and have a reputation of holy living.

Chapter four ends this section on boasting about leaders, and next Paul will address a particular situation that is so bad not even the pagans practice it. But to this point I hope we have at least grasped the fact that the saved can and do backslide, sometimes seriously so, but that this can be corrected with solid teaching from leaders who live the example of Jesus. Tolerance for mere differences of opinion is encouraged, but not false or worldly doctrine and practice. We must learn to know the difference.

The Teachings, Part Four

Paul begins 1 Cor. 5 with an expression of incredulity that the people (all of them, not some governing body) have not disfellowshipped a man living in sin with his stepmother. And not only is the whole group to administer this discipline (not some elite inquisition behind closed doors), but Paul declares something many believers today say is impossible: to be in fellowship from a distance. Paul is with them in spirit, regardless of the fact that he is not with them physically. This is another rebuttal to the notion that a proper gathering of believers cannot happen outside the walls of a consecrated building. They all, as a group, are to “hand this man over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh so that his spirit may be saved on the day of the Lord.” There’s a lot of theology in that statement, but for our topic in this book the main point is that when someone needs to be excluded from fellowship, it isn’t necessarily a declaration of that person being lost, and it is a decision that the whole congregation must agree to.

Then Paul gives the reason for such drastic action: to keep the fellowship pure. In stark contrast, today’s “seeker sensitive” movement actively recruits the impure into fellowship, with predictable results. There is hardly a “church” today that would have enough backbone to carry out Paul’s instructions to the Corinthians. But for all their faults, the Corinthians still knew the gospel and still had correct doctrine, and most of them were at least not practicing this grievous sin. But did Paul let any of their many faults keep them from having the right and duty to expel the man? No, and this highlights a very important principle: **the people expelling the man were very backslidden, worldly, and immature!** They were condoning this evil thing, yet Paul commands them to administer discipline. So much for the excuse that since all of us are sinners then we have no right to administer discipline. Paul is certainly lambasting the Corinthians for many things, but even the most immature congregation has to have some standards.

Another lesson learned from this chapter is that Paul had to clarify a misunderstanding, one that has long been a problem in Christianity. Many believers think that to be pure they must withdraw completely from the world, some even to the point of joining monasteries or the like. Many a believer has boasted of their outward purity, but what credit is it to be clean if you never leave your house? The truly pure are those who rub elbows with the world and yet still stay clean. Evidently the people thought Paul had taught them to stay cloistered. That is why in vs. 9-13 he explains where the line of fellowship is drawn, using the case of the man sinning with his stepmother as an illustration. And we would do well to heed this: “... you must not associate with any **who claim to be fellow believers** but are...”. And he punctuates this command with the extent of this rule: do not even eat with such people. Sadly, I could name several prominent and approved leaders in Christendom who exhibit all the things on that list. Truly the wolves are guarding the sheep.

Paul moves on to a new topic in chapter six, that of legal disputes among believers. But we have to be careful not to miss what Paul is saying here. He is not saying that

believers give up all their rights as citizens of their country, or he himself would not have used his Roman citizenship on several occasions (see Acts) when he was falsely accused or mistreated. He is undoubtedly talking now about internal disputes within the fellowship. [A recent case](#) illustrating where the line is drawn is that of Dr. Sheri Klouda, who was fired from her tenured position as professor of Hebrew at Southwestern Theological Seminary solely because she is female. The laws of our land forbid such a thing, but the excuse was given that this was a private school. However, even with the most narrow male supremacist view of scripture, this position was one that was not exclusively Christian nor carried any “ecclesiastical” authority. It was a terrible miscarriage of justice, and Dr. Klouda has every right, even as a believer, to sue the school in secular courts. And within the faith, femaleness, unlike homosexuality, is not a sin, efforts of male supremacists to say otherwise notwithstanding. This is the poorest witness as well, showing the world that Christians are unjust, cold-blooded, hypocritical, illogical, and hyper-literal.

Within that discussion Paul makes an important statement: that we believers will judge the world, and even angels! This matter of judging angels will be revisited later, but the point Paul is making here is that we must learn to judge our own disputes, at the very least as a matter of our witness. It would be better, Paul says, to be wronged on internal matters of the congregation, than to sue them and appeal to the ungodly for resolution. God will judge all of us eventually, so even if we do not get justice in this life we certainly will in the next. What is **not** taught in scripture is that God expects us to just continually absorb injustice at the hands of our spiritual siblings without His ever intending to make sure there is justice for the victims. While our actions have no bearing on our salvation, they are the topic of interest when we stand before God in judgment (what other reason is there for judgment, since our eternal destiny is already sealed?). There will be justice!

Paul is about to move into a broader discussion of sexual immorality, but first he makes a statement most people don’t notice: after listing various sins, including homosexuality, he says “And that is what some of you **were**.” So much for the claim that sexual perversion is inborn or unchangeable. The Corinthian congregation included former perverts, former idolaters, former adulterers, former thieves, the formerly greedy, former drunkards, former slanderers, and former swindlers. All are in the same list! (Note in verse 18 that Paul does put sexual sin in a class of its own. All sin has the same **result**, affecting our relationship with God, but scripture never says all sin will have the same **penalty** on judgment day. There is no use in being judged if God merely needs to count the number of sins. The very fact that we will be judged proves that each sin will be given an appropriate “weight”). And all “were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.” These were the people charged with throwing out anyone who **still** practiced such things yet claimed to be saved.

Having put out several “fires”, Paul now turns his attention in ch. seven to questions the people had asked about various issues, per verse 1: “Now for the matters you wrote about.” This question and answer format will form the bulk of the letter, and is another part of the context we must be careful not to forget. We must also be careful how much we infer from how Paul answers, since we are effectively hearing only one side of a conversation— **not** simply a lecture. We’ve all seen comedies or heard

jokes about the outrageous misunderstandings that can come from incomplete knowledge, but when such issues affect the Body of Christ it is no laughing matter.

Sometimes a translation, including the TNIV, will insert quotes into the text. But there were no quote marks in ancient Greek, so it really depends completely upon the opinion of the interpreter. However, in some cases there are small clues beyond obvious subject changes or statements he made elsewhere that can tell us when Paul is quoting someone else, which will turn out to be critical later on. The TNIV puts quotes here around "It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman." But contextually, it could go either way, as a quote from the Corinthians or a statement by Paul. But the point I'd like to make here is that this is typically done quite inconsistently, since we will see where no quotes were used even when there is clear grammatical and contextual warrant for it.

Regardless of who said what was put in quotes in this case, vs. 3-6 contain an important statement: when it comes to authority (*exousion*, meaning "jurisdiction"), husbands and wives have it equally over each other's body. This cannot be over-emphasized in light of the current movement toward absolute rule of the husband over the wife. Paul explicitly states the mutuality of this authority; neither wields it over the other in greater force. And note once again this instance of a concession. As we learned in earlier chapters, God can and does make concessions to human weakness, without sanctioning such weakness. But even so, weakness or not, there is to be no "lording over" from one spouse to the other.

In the verses following Paul gives separate instructions to the single, but then he says "To the married I give this command from the Lord" (vs. 10). Why? Didn't he just talk about married couples in the first seven verses? Look at this particular context: it is about divorce, not the institution of marriage and whether any Christian should marry. More importantly, note the use of the singular article: **A** wife. Is he just referring to any wife, as we might do in English? Then how can we make sense of verse 12, which begins with "To the rest" and is still talking about married couples? Who are "the rest" if Paul is giving a command to all married couples in verses 10-11? From all those clues we can conclude that Paul does not mean all married couples in vs. 10-11, but a particular couple. After all, in vs. 8-9 he could have used the generic singular but didn't: "To the unmarried... them... they...". So he is telling a particular couple that God does not want the wife to leave, but if she does it anyway, she cannot remarry but can reconcile with her husband, and neither does God want the husband to divorce her. Remember this about the writing style of Paul, because it will come up again.

We see it in vs. 12-16, but first we need to address the matter of when Paul says "I, not the Lord" or the opposite. Is he saying that sometimes he is writing under the Spirit's inspiration but other times he is not? No, he is saying that sometimes he has direct verbal commands from God and other times he does not. All are inspired writings, but only some are verbatim from the very mouth of God. We can trust that all scripture has the authority of divine inspiration.

Again in that passage we see that Paul uses singular pronouns, but note this critical difference: it begins with "if **any**". That makes the use of singular pronouns applicable to the entire group being addressed. It is absent from vs. 10-11. What

Paul is saying is that there are at least several couples in the Corinthian assembly that are considering divorce, and they are composed of one believing spouse and one unbelieving spouse. Paul is telling them that they can't divorce just because their spouse is an unbeliever. But on the other hand, as we see in vs. 15-16, Paul does not want them to stay together in strife just because the believer hopes their spouse will be saved. **Many interpreters get this exactly backwards.** Paul is **not** saying that they should stay together in misery because of the possibility of salvation! He is, in fact, saying that divorce between an unbeliever and a believer is permissible if they are unable to get along, going so far as to say that "The brother or sister [believer] is not bound in such circumstances." How much more clearly could Paul have put it than that, to say that Christians are not doomed to remain legally married to someone who has already divorced them mentally, spiritually, and emotionally?

Paul will return to more questions about marriage shortly, but in vs. 17-24 he digresses to touch on the issue of whether people should make a complete break from their jobs, marriages, etc. when they get saved. Here again we see compassion and freedom even in Paul's "prescriptions" (the literal meaning of the Greek word sometimes translated "rule" or "command"). And in this he tells us what God thinks of slavery: Christian slaves should watch for opportunities to become free, but not to rebel if no such opportunity presents itself. Yet at the same time a believer must not voluntarily enter into slavery. **This has critical impact on the push to tell women they must make themselves slaves of their husbands, fathers, etc.!** Some male supremacists argue that when a woman agrees to marry and takes vows to obey her husband, she cannot be considered a slave because she entered into it voluntarily. Paul is saying that this is **not** permissible for any believer! It is a false teaching to encourage Christian women to take vows of subservience to Christian men; it is in direct violation of scripture.

In the section about marriage not being forbidden but also not being the ideal state for believers (another strong rebuttal to those who insist that a Christian woman's highest calling is marriage and motherhood), note that the Christian man has exactly the same requirement to please his wife as the Christian woman does to please her husband. Again we see Paul teaching mutuality, not any chain of command. And as we learned before about God's practice of making concessions, we must not take Paul's discussion of whether a man should marry (or a father marry off his daughter, depending on the interpretation) as having significance in the use of masculine terminology, as if Paul is somehow sanctioning the perpetual social custom of men owning women! It would make him contradict his own teachings about mutuality.

The last two verses of ch. seven seem to be a separate little section, looking at the flow of the chapter. But here again we see the singular pronoun, and as with vs. 10-11 there is nothing to tell us it is meant generically. And when we consider that under Judaism a woman was bound by the law to marry the brother of her deceased husband, we can interpret what Paul says here as that there is a Jewish believer whose husband is near death, and she needs to know whether she is still bound by the law to marry his brother. Paul teaches clearly that a believer whose spouse dies must only marry another believer, so if he hadn't also said that she is free to marry anyone she wishes, she would have been caught between two contradictory commands. Consistently with what he had been saying about marriage for believers,

he repeats that it would be ideal for her to just remain single, again showing that marriage is not in fact the highest calling for a woman. I continually marvel at the ability of male supremacists to read these scriptures and still contradict them without the slightest twinge of conscience.

In chapter eight Paul moves to questions about diet. While the arguments he makes concerning symbolism and “eating at the table of idols” are not easy to grasp, I must limit my examination to that which pertains to the quest for what scripture says about power and control. The principle being taught here is that there is no such thing as a distinctly Christian diet, and there is no divine command against eating meat. But many believers do try to make divine laws out of such things anyway. And consistently with what he will write to the Romans (ch. 14), Paul teaches that we must consider the weak in faith above all. To issue decrees one way or the other is to trample on somebody’s conscience, and that is a sin against Christ.

The subject of ch. nine is an abrupt shift to the matter of self-defense. Paul shows by example that there is nothing wrong with a believer answering charges made against them, even in terms that are sometimes sarcastic or crude. When some try to control the behavior of others beyond what is warranted by scripture, according to their own personal convictions, they effectively homogenize the Body and try to erase every individual personality. But there is no divinely-mandated Christian persona; there is no approved vocabulary, dress (beyond modesty and for both sexes), or any other kind of micromanagement. Neither extreme, from winking at sin to taking snipes at fellow believers over secondary issues, is Christian behavior.

Within that topic Paul makes some statements typically taken out of context to justify the demand of preachers for salaries. Verses 7-12a are thundered from pulpits (another word not found in scripture), but curiously, 12b is left out, because it plainly states, “But we did not use this right.” As before, the examples of Paul and his co-workers is always of self-sufficiency, of parents caring for their children, of laying privilege and rights aside so as to serve without obligation. He repeats this in vs. 15-18, and points out that whoever is paid for their services has only done a job, while whoever serves voluntarily will be rewarded.

In vs. 19-23 Paul is not saying that he tries to look for the “good in other faiths”, as is preached today, but that he uses any hook he can to bring people the gospel. In “becom[ing] like one under the law” he is not saying we must all adhere to the Laws of Moses, or even some of them, but that he uses what he knows about it to reason with Jews. Likewise, he uses what he knows about non-Jews to reason with them as well.

At the end of the chapter Paul makes statements typically misunderstood to apply to salvation, as if not even Paul could ever be assured of it. But what has he been talking about all this time? Preaching the gospel, reaching out to people, serving at his own expense. As we learned earlier, (See “A New Creation” on Acts 20:24, later ref. to Phil. 3:14) Paul was striving to reach a prize, not receive a gift, and he has stated in this context that the prize is a future reward for serving faithfully.

In chapter ten Paul gives a history lesson as a backdrop for a warning against idolatry. And this in turn is the basis for what he says about the “bread and cup”. Is

Paul setting up or endorsing what we would call a “communion service”? If so, he mysteriously left out any details about it. Anything we call an ordinance or requirement would certainly be spelled out in these letters from which we derive our doctrine, but there are no instructions about it. Likewise for water baptism; Paul talks about it happening but gives no detailed directions concerning it, and even downplays it and separates it from the gospel.

But here, especially given the earlier discussion of eating meat offered to idols, we can know that Paul’s point about this memorial meal is that if something is done to honor God, that same kind of honor should not also be given to idols. I think the point he is driving at is that if others see us participating in things they associate with their religions, they will think we are only adding our own religious beliefs to the list—just as in ancient Rome, where all gods had to be accepted. But again, per the focus of this book, the important lesson is that since Paul did not give details about any ordinances for the *ekklesia*, and since we know of God’s practice of working through people’s social norms, Paul is saying that whatever we do as a group, we should do carefully and with due consideration. Above all, we have no right to institute laws of our own and call them divine or necessary.

In verse 23 we see more statements that are frequently put in quotes. In this case, we do have a clearer grammatical indication: the word translated “but” indicates opposition to the statement before it. There is another indication for strong, extreme opposition that we will examine later, but if this milder word can indicate a quote, certainly there is even more confidence in recognizing a quote when the stronger word is seen. Again, in itself this seems fairly insignificant, but it is something we know about Paul and thus a part of the context.

Paul continues to deal with the issue of conscience in our contacts with the world regarding this matter, and what he says in the second half of the chapter seems almost contradictory to the first. But he is simply presenting the same question from two perspectives: what **we** mean by what **we** do, and what **others** mean by what **they** do. First he tells believers not to violate their own consciences or give unbelievers the wrong impression, and then he tells believers to consider the consciences of others. The statements in quotes are the pivot point, and Paul is now addressing the other extreme where people saw no reason to restrict themselves since they knew that the other gods were false. He repeats in verses 31-33 what he had said in verse 24: seek the good of others, to the point of giving up your rights for the sake of saving the lost. And he wraps it all up in the first verse of the next chapter, which really belongs with this discussion.

We have come to another shift of topic, to things that have been more obvious points of contention over the centuries. But hopefully we have discovered important truths along the way, and gained a better understanding of where Paul is coming from in all this. We are learning his habits and becoming familiar with his train of thought, his choice of grammar, and his consistent appeal to humility and service out of love for others. Some, even unbelievers, only see Paul as a Pharisee making cold-hearted rules, but we know him better than that. And because we do, we will be better able to follow his reasoning on some very hotly-debated subjects to come.

The Teachings, Part Five

As if to pause for a quick breath before addressing the next question from the Corinthians, vs. 1 and 2 of ch. 11 provide some words of praise, much the way Paul begins all his letters. Then he gives a short preface to the question they asked about head coverings. But first we need to examine the Greek word for head, *kephale*. The people of the time believed that the body grew out of the head, and so used it as a metaphor for source or origin. Aristotle believed this, and Eustathius stated that the head of a river is that which generates the whole river (Homer, *Odyssey* 9.140, 13.102, 346. Eustathius, *On Iliad*, loc. cit.), as did others of that era. See also Paul's usage in Col. 2:19. It was not used in the sense of ruler or authority but progenitor; the usual Greek words for authority included *archon* (ruler), *epitrepo* (permission) and *exousion* (jurisdiction). So when we see the word "head" in English, we must not substitute the modern idea of ruler or boss or authority.

What Paul is doing in verse 3 is to use a play on words to introduce the topic of head coverings, that is, to begin with the metaphorical use and then move to the literal use. With the proper meaning of "head" in mind, the verse says, "But I want you to realize that the source of every man is Christ, and the source of the woman is man, and the source of Christ is God." It is the order of the sources that Paul is emphasizing; if he were trying to convey a chain of command the order would have been God (note God, not Father), then Christ, then man, then woman. But since we know no such chain of command has ever been seen in scripture before and that the order here is not the same as creation order, Paul must be referring to something else. And that something else is what we do see in scripture: God was the creator, and that includes Christ, (All three Persons created: Father (Deut. 32:6), Son (Col. 1:15-20), Spirit (Gen. 1:2)) so Christ is the source of man; the first woman came from the first man, and God brought Christ into the world via the seed of the woman. We should also note that no such word as "headship" exists in any form in scripture.

In spite of historical evidence for the meaning of the word *kephale* and thus the meaning of the passage, male supremacy is largely based upon the assertion that 1 Cor. 11:3 means every man is the boss of every woman, because God is the boss of Christ. This is also in spite of the bulk of NT teachings on mutuality and service, and the context being a question about head coverings. It serves as a classic example of lifting a verse out of context, and the great damage that can be caused by it. Such practices have spawned many cults.

Verses 4-6 could be the words of Paul, or they could be the question the Corinthians are asking, with vs. 7-16 being Paul's answer. I do think that context supports 4-6 being the question, whether quoted directly or being put in Paul's own words. A problem is being presented, involving the social taboo of a woman without a head covering. Such women were seen by society as having loose morals. On the other hand, Jewish men were to cover when approaching God to symbolize their servitude to Him ([one source](#)), but Christians were not to cover because the veil in the temple was torn when Jesus died, (Mt. 27:51) symbolizing our new standing as children and

heirs. That is why Paul says in vs. 4 that a head covering dishonors a man's head. So what was a Christian woman to do? To cover would be to dishonor the sacrifice of Jesus, and to uncover would bring dishonor on her own head because it would label her as immoral. So vs. 4-6 are a kind of moral dilemma, or as we would say today, it put Christian women "between a rock and a hard place."

In answering this question, Paul begins with a reference to creation. He mentions that the man is the image and glory of God. Does this mean that the woman is not? Of course it doesn't; we read in Gen. 1:27 that both male and female are made in the image of God. But what about glory? What does that mean? It means the crowning achievement, something which brings honor. Man was the pinnacle of creation, and this brought honor to God. So we have Paul establishing a fact from Genesis: one who is the glory of another must not cover their head in the presence of that other. So it follows that **since the woman is also the glory of another— man— then she too must not cover.** Note the "but", the contrasting connector there: the man must not cover since he is the glory of God **but** woman is the glory of man. This is opposite the interpretation of many that Paul is saying the woman's glory is of lesser status or value compared to the man's. In other words, Paul is **not** saying, "Since woman is merely the glory of man instead of God, she has to cover her head to symbolize her inferior role to man," but instead, "Man uncovers because he is the glory of another, so women must also not cover for that same reason."

We have additional support for this interpretation from the verses following. First Paul says in vs. 8-9 that although the first woman came from the first man, ever since then all men have come from women. Verse 8, directly following the statement about glory, is given to show **why** she is his glory; it begins with *gar* meaning "for" or "because" and provides the justification for the previous statement. But of course the next objection is that Paul follows with the statement about woman being made for man, which they presume without precedent to signify or prove her alleged secondary status. Again, we look in Genesis to see what Paul is referring to, and we remember that Eve's purpose as a "strong one facing" Adam was not to serve him as an underling but to come to his rescue, a strong ally. This makes vs. 10 flow naturally in the context, since Paul says that "for this reason" (referring to her being his rescuer), "a woman ought to have **authority over her own head.**" There are no such words as "a sign of" and it is not implied. And the Greek word for authority Paul uses is *exousia*, and it is "her own". That is, the woman has jurisdiction over her own head and thus is the one to decide whether or not to cover it.

Paul adds yet another reason for a woman having this authority over her own head: "because of the angels". There has been much speculation over this curious statement, including the absurd notion that angels can be moved to lust if they see a woman's uncovered head! And where does the notion of lust enter into this statement anyway, since Paul is talking about authority? How could the lack of a sign of authority move an angel to lust, and who would think this only could happen during prayer and prophecy? Only the worst scripture twisting and poorest logic could hold to such an idea. So what does Paul mean by it? Remember that earlier in this letter he scolded the people for their inability to judge their own disputes, and in doing so he reminded them that they would someday judge angels. Since Paul did not exclude women from that statement, and since he just said a woman has the authority to judge for herself whether or not to cover her head, then we must

conclude that he is justifying that authority in a woman because of her equal standing in the eventual judgment of angels. Another possibility is that the Greek word translated as angels, which literally means “messengers”, refers to Roman spies who would infiltrate meetings in order to report upon any possible sedition or rebellion. The argument then is that allowing women to uncover their heads would be seen as a sign of such rebellion and so is not permitted. However, if this were the case then surely Paul would have commanded all Christian women to cover. Also, it doesn't say “because of messengers” but “because of **the** messengers”, and there is no other NT reference to such spies.

Then in vs. 11-12 Paul adds another factor: **in the Lord** men and women are not independent of each other. And as already mentioned, all come from women, but above all, all come from God. If this is not a clear and explicit statement that there is no intrinsic hierarchy in chronology, I can't imagine what such a thing would look like; Paul just dismissed that idea in no uncertain terms.

Finally in vs. 13 Paul almost mockingly tells the Corinthians to judge for themselves in this matter. But what he says next is almost universally mistranslated. It does **not** say that nature tells us long hair is a disgrace for men and a glory for women. Where is any such lesson seen in nature? In fact we see the opposite: both men and women can grow long hair naturally. The only way to invent the idea that nature does show such a thing is by turning what the Greek indicates is a statement into a question. It literally reads,

behooving it-is woman uncovered to-the God to-be-praying not-even the nature itself is-teaching you that...

There are no grammatical indicators of a question being asked here; it is a statement of fact: it is fitting for a woman to pray with her head uncovered, and for the same reason it is also fitting for a man, per the overall context. Finally, in verse 16, Paul dismisses the whole thing by telling them that they are the only ones having a problem figuring this out. When he says, “we have no such custom”, he means it. Some translations say “no **other**” custom, but the Greek word *toioutos* does not mean “other” (that would be *allos*). So we could sum up Paul's answer as follows:

A woman, as the glory of another, is not to cover her head. But because of the social taboo, let each woman decide for herself, because it's literally her head on the line. She too will judge angels! As for hierarchy, order of creation is irrelevant in the *ekklesia*, for we all come from God. And not even nature tells us anything about head coverings, as if this were some inviolable divine law and not a social custom. Hair happens—naturally—to both men and women. Just figure it out, will you?! And in case you want to argue with me about this, first consider the fact that nobody else has any such custom.

There is one other point to make before moving on to the next issue: the fact that Paul says women pray and prophesy in mixed gatherings. Otherwise there would be no controversy over head coverings, especially if they signified male authority. In other words, what need is there for a sign of male authority if women can only pray and prophesy with other women? This whole passage concerns what women do during prayer and prophecy, which nobody would think the women are doing silently!

If we but think through the implications of some of these novel interpretations, we would see that they are self-contradictory, not to mention making Paul self-contradictory as well, as we will see when we come to another passage about women that some think commands their silence in the meetings.

While in vs. 2 Paul praised the Corinthians for holding to the traditions he had passed on to them, vs. 17 has Paul rebuking them for what they have done to some of those traditions. He mentions “divisions” among them, and from what he describes we see that it was typical worldly class warfare (as a quick side note, it is significant that Paul mentions people getting drunk but never condemns all drinking, neither here nor in any of his letters). But as with his other discussion of the memorial meal, he is not commanding a new ritual but keeping an existing one from getting out of hand. And his rebuke is for the fact that by their attitude they show contempt for the sacrifice of the Jesus they claim to be remembering. His emphasis in this section is clearly on the importance of honoring Jesus; failure to do so is what he calls “an unworthy manner”. This is not, as some claim, an excuse for those of presumed authority to put other believers under some kind of inquisition in order to extract confessions from them. It would be better for them not to participate in this meal than to do so with the wrong attitude, and Paul even tells them in vs. 29-31 that some of them have suffered and died because of it. Even so, God’s purpose in this punishment is to keep the group pure.

In chapter twelve Paul brings up the issue of spiritual gifts, a long-standing controversy in Christendom. Suffice it for our study to observe that the gifts are given by one Spirit as He sees fit, and that these gifts do not come in shades of pink and blue (female and male) or with any expiration dates. And he illustrates the unity of it all with the analogy of the human body. A healthy body has only one head, and all the parts report to that head and not each other. No part has to get permission from another part to do anything, and no part can consider itself either superior or inferior to another. Most importantly, the head and body form one unit, one flesh, and what is true of one part is true of all the others, though each part has its unique function. Note also that Paul in vs. 13 speaks now of our baptism in the Spirit, as opposed to how he viewed water baptism. The parts of a healthy body work together, each part supplying what the others may lack, and it is only when all are functioning properly that the body can accomplish what it needs to.

That all seems so obvious, but think of the implications. Paul says we are supposed to be one body of many parts, all working together and taking our life from the Head, which is Christ. There are no classes of believers said to be excluded from the Body in any way or told that they cannot use their gifts in certain ways or situations; there is no rank among the parts of the Body. And regardless of whether Paul is giving simply a chronology of gifts or some kind of alleged hierarchy in vs. 28, it is impossible to miss the point that he has repeated: all parts are needed equally. It is quite likely, since Paul began the chapter with a reference to how the people viewed such things as spiritual gifts when they were pagans, that this whole matter came up because they were alarmed that such things could happen among believers. That is why he prefaced his discussion with a way to test the spirits, and closed it with a plea to stop going after the more exciting or “presentable” gifts.

Chapter thirteen is perhaps the most familiar of all Paul's writings, but how poorly we have put it into practice over the centuries! Many today forbid criticism of popular teachers because "they teach correct doctrine". But what does this chapter say? Over and over, the message is "It is worthless without love." Of course, this does **not** mean that doctrine is unimportant, only that it must be accompanied by love.) The rankest unbeliever can recite and analyze the scriptures, and even accurately present the gospel. But as Paul tells us here, it amounts to nothing more than the noise of clashing cymbals if it comes from an unchanged heart. And what about love not demanding its own way, of not keeping a record of wrongs, of being kind and humble, of not tearing others down, of always protecting? All of those things that love does (or does not do) are being violated by the controlling spirit, whether through heavy-handed clerical rule or male supremacism. I cannot count the number of times I've heard "the husband has the final say", as if two best friends are unable to get along unless one is in charge. Love does **not** demand to "have the final say"! It does not pout or throw a tantrum if it cannot have its way. It does not threaten for disobedience or plot revenge for failure to measure up. It serves; it builds up, it heals, it praises, it cares. How can there be any division by race, class, or sex if this Body is healthy and operates under the law of love? This chapter is a scathing indictment of the demonic doctrines of pride and violence being promoted in the "churches" today.

Chapter fourteen continues on this topic, and Paul reassures the Corinthians that there is nothing wrong with wanting spiritual gifts. He goes on to explain that the most useful gifts are those that build up the Body, as opposed to those that primarily benefit the one having the gift. So much of what is being taught today is self-centered and focused on our own needs instead of looking outward to other believers. Notice in vs. 22 Paul says that the gift of "tongues" (divine power to speak in a language the speaker does not know) is a sign for unbelievers, while prophecy, not called a "sign", is for believers. He explained this in vs. 21, which cites the sign of tongues as the fulfillment of an OT prophecy condemning people who refuse to listen. But we also know that it was a sign for the Jews on Pentecost, and that some of the people in the crowd that day did listen. At any rate, it is a sign for unbelievers, while prophecy builds up the community of believers.

Now in verse 26 Paul focuses on how people behave when they meet together, but remember that this is still part of the overall topic of problems in the Corinthian congregation. Paul is not only telling us that everyone participated (in stark contrast to the typical Sunday service or even Sunday School class), but that the Corinthians were doing so to the point where there was chaos. Neither passivity nor confusion is good for the Body, so Paul urges them to tone things down and take one thing at a time. He speaks of order without specifying a liturgy or program, but makes it known that each participant is responsible for controlling themselves. This is the intended character of a Christian meeting. How many "churches" follow this, to any significant degree? How do people build each other up and share their gifts when they sit in pews all facing one direction? And if Paul is in fact prescribing something like that, why does he not mention any sort of leader or presiding officer?

Now to vs. 34-38, which in some ancient manuscripts appears at the end of the chapter. But no matter where that section winds up, it is still part of the topic of how our meetings are conducted. However, note that in vs. 39-40 Paul explicitly states

that the sign gifts are not to be forbidden (again supporting the interpretation that the people were afraid they were pagan influences), and that whatever we do as a group, it should be self-controlled instead of chaotic.

Some insist that Paul clearly prohibits all women for all time from uttering a sound in the meetings. Yet as we just saw in the section about head coverings, there is no other place where a Christian woman would prophecy! He would not have said anything about whether women should cover their heads if they can't speak publicly anyway. But since we know he did assume women were prophesying and did not forbid it before, then we can hardly think he either forgot what he wrote earlier or openly contradicted himself here, especially since both are in the same letter!

Now we come to a very important matter of quotation, and we have clear indicators that put the content of vs. 34-35 in a quote not from Paul but from the Corinthians, specifically their quotation of the Jewish Talmud (Gordon Fee, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, 707.). If this were an OT law, where is it? We have already learned that Paul would not make up a new law for the OT, so it must be there if this is in fact a statement by Paul, but there is no such law. And even if there were, would this be the same Paul that argued so forcefully against putting Christians under it when he wrote to the Galatians? Again, Paul is not forgetful, stupid, or contradictory. And he is not inconsistent; in every other case where he quotes the OT, he makes it very clear. Obviously, either this "new" Paul is an impostor, or the real Paul is quoting non-scripture— and is about to refute it strongly. Lest anyone think this is a new interpretation or bad exegesis, let us consult Sir William Ramsey (1851-1939), Professor at Oxford and Aberdeen, the most widely accepted authority on Paul in the early 1900's: "We should be ready to suspect Paul is making a quotation from the letter addressed to him by the Corinthians whenever he alludes to their knowledge, or when any statement stands in marked contrast either with the immediate context or with Paul's known views."

Now that we know those two verses are a quote from legalists in Corinth and not a command from Paul, his rebuttal in vs. 36 takes on a whole new light. It begins with a small Greek letter (*ετα*) which is typically either ignored and untranslated or rendered weakly as "Or". But it is in fact an expression of strong objection, and as such marks the end of what preceded it and the beginning of a rebuttal. Some interpret this instead as an anticipated objection, that is, that Paul is answering a hypothetical objection to his restrictions on women. But not only would such a thing be extremely rare given the patriarchal culture, Paul does not introduce it as he does in every other case of such an anticipated argument (e.g. Rom. 9:19).

So we have these indicators to tell us exactly where the quote begins and ends. And we have the content of that rebuttal: "What?? Did the Word of God come from you?? What?? Did it only come to you?? Let whoever has any sense agree that what I have said [as opposed to this ridiculous quote] is what really came from God. Away with anyone who won't listen!" If "plain reading" were practiced consistently and included all aspects of context including the original language, it would not make Paul's teachings into a tangled mass of confusion and source of endless bickering. This context makes his teaching very plain indeed, such that any who teach the silencing of Christian women in the meetings must do so in open and willful defiance of scripture.

The topic of ch. fourteen is the resurrection of the dead, but there are a couple of things to note about Paul's writing style. In vs. 35 he shows the way he introduces a hypothetical question, one that may be anticipated as a rebuttal or objection to what he has written. This is important to remember for cases we will encounter later where he does not follow this pattern and is therefore not posing a hypothetical question. Another point is in the next verse, which literally means "You fool!" Who would allow such talk today? Yet ironically, there are some "preachers" who in a quest to be "culturally relevant" (yet somehow not actually "bowing to culture") have made a habit of cursing as the world does. But apparently that is permitted only by certain people. However, if Paul has set himself up as an example for every believer and not a privileged class, then there must be times when forceful expression is permissible. Those of the controlling spirit who demand that others only speak as they decree need to learn this.

In the final chapter of this letter Paul addresses the matter of giving to the needy. And as we will see, he does not endorse one of the most ingrained methods of control and what has become a joke among unbelievers: tithing for Christians. We have already learned about the fact that where the priesthood goes, so goes the law, and that non-Jews were never under the OT law at all. We also know that Paul is not an inventor of new burdens nor one to demand a salary nor to set up a ruling class. And of course we know Paul will not contradict himself. With all that in mind, we can at least know what he is **not** talking about.

In vs. 1-2 he tells them to do what he says he told the Galatians: set aside money. Note several things: First of all, it is done on "one/first of sabbaths". "First of Sabbaths" refers to the day of the wave offering, which is the first day of the week after Passover and the start of marking off 7 weeks until Pentecost (Lev. 23:5-21); see verse 8. Second, it is to be done by each individual, and the amount depends on how much the person "prospered". This is not an income tax but an appeal to sharing from the excess God has blessed a person with. Third, We know that the early believers did meet on the first day of the week (John 20:19, Acts 20:7) but of course that was not the only day they met (Acts 19:9, Heb. 3:13). There is not any scripture in the NT to tell Christians when or where to meet. Paul tells us explicitly that the purpose is to meet a specific physical need; he is not talking about "worship services" here at all. Fourth, by saying "each one of you" he is putting this into the hands of the givers, not any officiating body or imaginary NT equivalent of the OT "storehouse". And no percentage is given for the statement "in keeping with your income". As he will elaborate in another letter, Paul is emphasizing the voluntary nature of this gift, and it is indeed a gift, not an obligation or compulsory tax. Nothing can be both an act of charity and a tax, just as nothing can at the same time be both a gift and a wage.

The purpose of this collection was never given as a perpetual requirement, but as a one-time event for a specific need in Jerusalem. After the money was collected, the people as a group were to select several from their number to deliver it, and Paul would supply them with letters of introduction. Curiously, the TNIV specifies that men were to do this, but the Greek says "whoever". And if anyone wants to make a doctrine out of grammatical gender in spite of it being erroneous, we should point out to them that if there were at least one male in a group, the grammatical male form of the word was used. There is no word here that is exclusively indicative of males.

In verse 16 we see the word *hupotasso* again, and remember that it means “to be attached to, to be a support of”, as in supporting documentation for a legal claim (see The Teachings, Part One). It is good to at least spot-check the ways Paul uses words that may be the source of controversy, and here again we see nothing to indicate enforced obedience to a ruler or boss. And again in vs. 18 we see that the TNIV chose to use the word “men” when the Greek says “these”. Perhaps they interpret it as specifically referring to the ones named, who all happened to be males, but it is not an accurate translation and could be taken by the “plain reading” approach as sanctioning only males for such “jobs”.

Finally, we see mention of our familiar friends Aquila and Priscilla, and Paul sends greetings from them and also the *ekklesia* that meets in **their** house. It seems from Paul’s habits of referring to them that both were likely elders in a congregation. But we cannot close without one more controversy: in vs. 22 Paul wishes a curse upon any who do not love the Lord! If believers today are to be labeled as unloving or divisive when we do not always bless our enemies, then so also must Paul. Could it be that we have misunderstood what Paul said here in 4:12 about not cursing those who curse us, and what he will say later to the Romans (Rom. 12:14)? Or perhaps we only need to pay closer attention to each context and avoid making universal doctrines out of letters written to specific people. This is a vital question to answer, because when we encounter topics such as women in the *ekklesia* and we appeal to the time or culture, we are accused of “hermeneutical gymnastics” or reading into the text just to support our dastardly plot to “bow to culture”. (Well if Paul can be sarcastic, so can I!)

The Teachings, Part Six

The second letter to the Corinthians was probably written shortly after the first, and once again we note that it is addressed to all the people instead of a ruling class or “head pastor”. And in vs. 24 of that first chapter, Paul explicitly states that not even he would “lord it over your faith”, repeating the principle that any perceived privilege and authority must be laid down and replaced with the heart of a servant.

Chapter two gives us more insight into the way Paul uses grammar. Note the pattern in vs. 5-8: “If anyone... he... him...”. We do not see any mixing of singular and plural such as the “she... they” of 1 Tim. 2:15, and that Paul has a specific man in mind is clear, especially when we remember what he wrote before about the man sinning with his stepmother. They evidently followed Paul’s instruction to throw the man out of their fellowship, and now that he has repented, they are to welcome him back. This also proves that he was never considered lost, since there is no hint here of the man having ever lost or regained his salvation, but only that he was to be punished for his sin. And it shows us how we should be handling such things. But instead we have been unwilling to throw people out, such that they are never brought to the point of great sorrow that would lead to repentance.

At the end of the chapter Paul repeats the principle that servants of the gospel must not use it for profit. But I really think this goes with ch. 2, which begins with Paul defending himself against false charges, this time of both conceit and of claiming false credentials. Yet he still appeals to God, not to his own authority, and always refers to himself as a servant and not a boss. One can be bold without claiming supremacy, if that boldness comes from confidence in God.

Paul goes on in ch. four to show that his motives are pure and in line with all the qualities he keeps urging every believer to have. And if, as he points out in vs. 7, God puts His power into us lowly “jars of clay” in order for all the glory to go to Him, then who would even try or desire to boss other believers? What kind of example is that? And for all believers, as Paul states in 2 Cor. 5:9, our motivation should never be earthly comfort or praise, or even the rewards we are promised in heaven, but “to please Him”. Service done for any other reason has already been given its reward.

In 2 Cor. 6:11-12 we see the heart of a true servant, as Paul pours out his heart to the people and begs them to reconcile with him. He is, as he states plainly, appealing to them as a mother to her children, not as a boss to his employees. How many times must Paul give this example before everyone with alleged “ecclesiastical” or flesh-based authority understands this?

Then in vs. 14 we see a phrase that is almost universally ripped from context and applied to so-called mixed-race marriage: “Do not be unequally yoked”. But what is the rest of the sentence? “with unbelievers”. Paul is not talking about marriage at all, even remotely, but about believers teaming up with unbelievers. How we have forgotten this today! We have instead adopted the lie that “the end justifies the means”, joining forces with the heathen for a “greater good”, convincing ourselves

that Paul really didn't have a clue about how much more good could result when people form larger groups and pool their resources. And we barely raise an eyebrow when a believer marries an unbeliever, while throwing a tantrum if their skin colors don't match closely enough. But remember what Paul wrote before: he does not mean for us to withdraw from the world and thus fail to be a witness, but to refrain from forming teams with unbelievers.

Paul continues in ch. seven on the theme of reconciliation. But note what he is saying there: he had to be blunt with them because he loves them. Today, most congregations forbid such confrontation and label it divisive, mean, negative, etc. They cannot see past the initial pain which is necessary for the end result of restoration. Paul goes on to express the fact that it hurt him as well, but that his joy is even greater now because the rebuke caused them to turn from sin.

The topic changes in ch. 8 to that of giving to the needy, but even this is turned into a weapon of legalistic guilt by the controlling spirit. How often we hear sermons on "giving beyond your means", citing this passage as justification. But notice the critical difference: **nobody pressured them** to do so! They did it of their own free will, from their hearts; that is true giving. Starting in vs. 8, Paul even states in his gentle encouragement for the Corinthians to follow suit, that he is **not** commanding them. Again Jesus is held up as the Example to follow, that of one with wealth, power, and privilege giving up everything to serve others. All Paul is asking them to do is to follow through on their promises.

I don't know how it could be stated any more clearly than Paul does in vs. 13-15, that the whole purpose of Christian giving is "that there might be equality". This is the community of believers in action; this is a family caring first of all for its own. And this, as Paul states, is all done willingly. But in spite of his explicit statement in vs. 12, "the gift is acceptable **according to what one has, not according to what one does not have**", many preachers today pressure people to give more than they have, some even to the point of telling them to charge their credit cards!

The last two verses show some interesting translation choices in the TNIV. Titus is called a "partner and co-worker", from the Greek words *koinonos* and *sunergos*. The first is typically translated as "fellowship" when a noun (1 Cor. 1:9), or "communion" in some versions, but it really is more accurate to call it a partnership. The second, interestingly, is also used of Priscilla, Euodia and Syntyche (Rom. 16:3, Phil. 4:3), along with Paul himself and many others. And once again, even though the Greek says only "them", the TNIV has "these men".

In ch. nine Paul returns to urging the people to give generously so as to make his boasting about them true. But again he goes into detail about proper Christian motives for giving. In vs. 6-7 he states explicitly that "each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly **or under compulsion**, for God loves a cheerful giver." It is utterly impossible for any true Christian giving to happen as a result of sermons dripping with guilt and shame! This cannot be forced or coerced. Some preachers even twist the "cheerful" part into saying we must give more than we have and do it with a smile on our faces! And the poor listeners try their very best to comply, thinking there is something wrong with them for not being

happy about it (which is what said preachers want). Like the ancient Pharisees, they heap layer after layer of guilt upon people and whip them if they don't keep up.

Or, picking up on Paul's statement in vs. 8-11, the preachers promise riches and paybacks from God. But that is not giving at all, it is **investing**. Curiously, the preachers who make such claims never seem to practice them themselves. Why do they demand money from the people instead of giving it out for that fabulous return? There is a world of difference between what Paul is saying here about trusting the God in whose Name we give, and giving solely for the promise of a return. Remember that part about being motivated by the desire to please Jesus? That still holds true. We must not let the prize become more important to us than the One who awards it.

Another point needs to be made here: Do not look through the Bible for formulas. It is not a book of incantations but a series of letters to you from God. To read the Bible seeking methods or practices to invoke God's blessings, whether for riches or healing or whatever it might be, is to only seek the gift and not the Giver. This is not to say we cannot look there for comfort, or to find out what pleases our Master and Savior, but that we cannot take a verse or passage as a formula for success or some kind of magic wand. Seek the Author.

Notice in vs. 12 that the purpose of giving, as mentioned before, is to supply the needs of the Master's people. It is not to supply a pulpit, new choir robes, pew cushions, jets, cars, buildings, or anything else typically justified by the rationale that "it is for the Lord's work". God doesn't need any of that, and neither do His people. We need food, clothing, shelter, medicine, and instruction in the Word.

Chapter ten has Paul returning to self-defense, and to the charge that he is only bold from a distance. Apparently some have accused him of worldly ambition and ulterior motives, most likely in an effort to turn people away from him and toward them, because they crave rule and popularity. But in spite of the context, some take the statements there about "demolishing strongholds" as a mandate for an almost superstitious attitude towards the demonic. They go around making claims and performing rituals to exorcise demons from an area, based primarily on this passage. Paul states that it is argument and pretension that he battles, taking captive his own thoughts into service for Christ.

But some of the people at Corinth had been judging only by the external. Yet we are no different today. We decree that matters of the flesh such as sex or personality are what God values and uses to determine who can serve Him and how. We presume someone to be spiritually mature just because they obtained a seminary degree. We are easily impressed by those with skill at public speaking. We presume that whatever teachings come from large organizations must be true and that any who dare to question them are only causing division. Where is individual responsibility? Where is discernment? Where is the Spirit? Why do we not heed Paul's warning in vs. 13 about false apostles, about those who seem to be sincere and holy ("angels of light") but are of Satan?

Paul really hits the nail on the head in vs. 20: they were willing to put up with those who wanted to enslave them, no matter how shamefully they were treated. We do

this today! We allow ourselves to be pressured into tithing, we accept rebuke for questioning perceived authority; we the sheep are pressed into the service of these self-proclaimed shepherds. We go into debt to “give”, we serve the organization till we burn out, we beat our fellow servants if they step out of line, and we keep coming back for more. Enough is never enough for the controllers, no matter how well or how long we serve them.

In 2 Cor. 12:10 we see Paul’s famous statement, “When I am weak, then I am strong.” But why do some still want to be in charge of others? How does that show the glory of God instead of their own glory? Why not be seen as weak so that God is better seen as strong? Instead, today we have preachers boasting about their being “alpha males” and demanding blind obedience. They glory in their strength and power, they brag about the numbers they pull in, they compare each other by the size of staff in their service. How is it possible to follow Paul in his teaching here about being weak? Even in this, Paul uses sarcasm to get his point across. But the point is still that leaders are not to be supported by followers, just as children do not save up for their parents.

Paul begins the next chapter with a curious statement: his three visits to them qualify as having three witnesses to establish valid testimony. This is another support for the claim that Paul does not make up new laws, especially if they are to be justified by the OT. So if Paul wishes to establish something as a fact based upon the testimony of witnesses, he repeats it. This is an important part of context which we cannot ignore, as it has bearing on various controversial topics.

There are no tribunals or offices of inquisition for believers to stand before in any matters of faith and practice, only the Word of God. That is why, in vs. 5, Paul says “examine yourselves”. He is telling the people to make sure that the reason they’re having all these problems is not because they were never saved. And his purpose in writing has not been to rule from a distance, but to give them a chance to discipline themselves before someone else has to do it. He seeks, as any good leader, to build up and not tear down— quite the opposite of many today who seem to never tire of berating their followers.

A few years later, Paul wrote what is easily his weightiest theological dissertation: the letter to the Romans. But it focuses mostly on law and judgment and the technical aspects of our salvation. It is laid out as a formal argument, building to a central point (about ch. 9 through 11, concerning the unity of Jew and Gentile in Christ) and then working back from there. But regardless of the content, Paul follows his usual custom and identifies himself as a slave of Jesus.

He is also an apostle, which is a transliteration of the Greek word meaning one who is sent out or commissioned by another to perform some task. It really does mean the same as our word “missionary”, and it was never an exclusively Christian title. But we observe from the way the word is used of various people in the NT, that it carries the connotation of one who starts new congregations after bringing the gospel to places it had not yet been. That is why there is mention of many with that designation, so understanding what it means can clear up some confusion— as well as help us identify those who falsely claim it. There have been many reports of

missionaries who testified to the miraculous accompanying them on their travels, which is in keeping with what we see in the NT.

While there is much in this letter we could study, we have already seen in the letter to the Hebrews how believers now relate to the Law. Paul does not contradict any of that here, but reinforces it in great detail, with emphasis on Jewish believers. But there is still plenty to look at for our topic of control and power in Christianity.

In Rom. 5:12-15 we come across a statement about Adam, and we see there that Paul lays blame for the entrance of sin into the world at his feet alone. This is significant as we recall our study of Genesis. Clearly Paul sees the same thing in Genesis that we saw: Adam's sin was different from Eve's in a very significant way. His direct rebellion is what brought sin into the world, while Eve is not even mentioned here because she did not rebel as Adam did. It was her Seed that paid for the sin of Adam, which is why Paul makes a contrast between Jesus and Adam, not Jesus and Eve or both of them, and why Paul referred to Jesus as "the last Adam" in 1 Cor. 15:45.

Chapter six is where Paul argues forcefully against our freedom in Jesus being mistaken for a license to sin. There is no point in expending so much effort to extricate people from the old law without attaching them to the new one, and making sure they understand that this law of love means pleasing our Savior. But in vs. 4 is he talking about water baptism? Not at all; the topic is our unity in Christ, and he is still in a discussion of law and grace. This is the same Paul who keeps fighting against any sort of legalism while being sure that it is balanced by our desire to live a life that pleases God.

Chapter seven serves as a good example of the grammatical style of Paul as he discusses a hypothetical woman. He uses the singular throughout, never mixing "she" and "they". It is clear that he is not talking about a real person, but it is singular nonetheless, and consistently so. Compare vs. 1-3 with vs. 4-6 to see the contrast between a hypothetical singular and a real group. Paul is consistent and unambiguous, an important point we will encounter later in his letters to Timothy. And chapter nine gives us an example of another of Paul's habits. When he anticipates an objection to an argument, he prefaces it with something like we see in vs. 19: "One of you will say to me...". We recall the discussion in Part Five about how Paul did not use such an introduction concerning the issue of women keeping silent in the meetings.

Chapter ten is where we see Paul's famous, simple, and controller-defying definition of the gospel: declare that Jesus is Lord and believe God raised Him from the dead. But note that it does **not** say "Jesus is **my** Lord", per the "Lordship Salvation" understanding by which a person must sincerely intend to "make Jesus my Lord" by doing some undefined level of good deeds. It is the acknowledgement that Jesus is The Lord, the Messiah. But to be saved includes also the conviction that God raised Jesus from the dead. This is what it means to "call on the name of the Lord". As for works or good deeds, scripture never draws a line with specified actions or levels of holiness required for salvation, but only genuine faith in the risen Lord Jesus. If works are also required, it not only defies what Paul teaches about salvation by faith, but there is no consensus among Lordship Salvationists on exactly what or how

many works are required. And again, this does not lead to a license to sin; we have made that point already.

Chapter eleven is an important one for answering the claim of some that the *ekklesia* replaced Israel. This is known as Replacement Theology; there is also an opposite version where Israel replaces the *ekklesia*, or more accurately, where the *ekklesia* is absorbed into Israel. Paul states point blank that God has not rejected Israel, offering himself as proof. Note that he knows his lineage and tribe, which would be impossible if the “lost tribes” theory were right. Paul backs up his claim with a little historical reminder as well. And we can consult the OT for example after example of Israel becoming unfaithful and being expelled from the land, only to see a remnant return after years of exile. And who would think that the *ekklesia* has been any more faithful than Israel? Are we only to appropriate her blessings and not her curses? Rest assured that God keeps His promises, which do not depend upon the faithfulness of Israel.

The discussion there about wild and natural branches is one that leads some to believe that the *ekklesia* is “grafted into” Israel, but that is not what it says. The branches, natural or not, are not the vine. Natural branches are made of the same substance, but they can be broken off; it is the vine that both natural and wild are attached to. So both Jews and Gentiles, when they accept Jesus, are made a part of the Vine which is Jesus. And though there is much more to say about all that, our purpose here is to know what the *ekklesia* is, and what it is not, so we know how to interpret the teachings concerning it. Note vs. 28-32 that Paul is saying that though God has set Israel aside for the time being, they are still loved, and God will honor His promises to the patriarchs of Israel. This must be considered carefully by those who claim God is finished with Israel and that we are under no obligation to support them since they are in unbelief.

There is an abrupt shift in tone beginning in chapter twelve, but notice vs. 3, which repeats Paul’s theme of humility for all believers. And this is said to preface another human body analogy, reinforcing the teaching that there is no chain of command among the various parts (1 Cor. 12, The Teachings, Part Five). This is repeated in vs. 10 and 16, and I would ask those who still support a clergy/laity class distinction or male over female hierarchy, how do you “honor one another above yourselves” while thinking others are beneath you in some spiritual way?

Then in vs. 14 we see something that seems to conflict with Paul’s own examples in these letters: bless, not curse, those who persecute you. How do we resolve this apparent conflict? By remembering who Paul is talking about. Persecution comes from without (non-believers), while false teachings and destructive heresies come from within. Paul shows that we are to strongly refute and oppose anything that would infiltrate the Body and eat it up from the inside, but that persecution from the unbelieving world is to be met with the same attitude God has shown to all who are lost. As Paul told the Corinthians when confronting them about the man sinning with his stepmother, it is our business to judge those on the inside, and let God judge those on the outside. We must remind those who try to silence any believer who confronts another believer over falsehood that scripture distinguishes between the two groups.

Who is Paul talking about in ch. thirteen? Secular government, as shown by the fact that these authorities “bear the sword”, that is, they are armed. God instituted government to restrain sin and allow people to live peaceful lives, as much as possible. Paul, as did Jesus, teaches believers to be model citizens and so honor the name of Jesus. And vs. 10 is another strong rebuttal to any who would put believers under the Law: love fulfills the law. Ironically, many who espouse Lordship Salvation come across as mean-spirited and controlling instead of loving.

Now to chapter fourteen, about “disputable matters”. From the teachings of some, one would think that all of scripture is so very obvious that there is no such thing as a disputable matter. But of course they mistake personal conviction for divine ordinance. Here Paul tries to get the idea across that there are areas in which sincere believers can disagree, and that our reaction to this says a lot more about our hearts than which side we take in a given controversy. In spite of the convictions of many through the centuries, Paul states clearly that there is no divine mandate for a day of rest or worship, a particular diet, or any such thing. We are parts of one Body, not disjointed blobs of tissue! So we must be careful with our personal convictions. And that means not mandating on one side or the other for the entire *ekklesia*. How can people practice this spiritual discipline if some presumed authorities mandate it over them? Would they not be violating what Paul says in this passage, since they may force some believers to violate their conscience?

Paul begins the final chapter in this letter with a request to honor a woman named Phoebe. He describes her as a *diaconon*, the same root word transliterated as “deacon” for many men in the NT, including Paul. It should always be translated “servant” since it denotes one who waits tables (Acts 6:2). But as we will see in subsequent letters, there was evidently a group within the *ekklesia* that were called by this term but apparently had a special kind of service. Technically, all believers are *diaconoi*, but there was a kind of service that required higher standards.

The context here, meaning the wording Paul chose, seems to indicate that Phoebe is among those who meet that higher standard. We can see this from the phrase, “she has been a *prostatis* of many, including me”. This word means “a woman set over others; a female guardian, protectress, patroness, caring for the affairs of others and aiding them with her resources” (see [this source](#)). Does this not describe an elder, a pastor, a shepherd? And who is to say that elders and “servants” are mutually exclusive terms? Historically, it may indicate one who was a public benefactor, and for the believers, may have been one who protected them by means of their influence or standing in society. Regardless, we must not treat her differently than we would treat a man so designated by Paul; if there would be no dispute as to the person’s standing were this a male, then there is no grammatical or contextual excuse to dispute it when it is a female, or we are guilty of the logical fallacy of “special pleading”. From [this source](#):

Special Pleading is a fallacy in which a person applies standards, principles, rules, etc. to others while taking herself (or those she has a special interest in) to be exempt, without providing adequate justification for the exemption. This sort of reasoning has the following form:

1. Person A accepts standard(s) S and applies them to others in circumstance(s) C.
2. Person A is in circumstance(s) C.
3. Therefore A is exempt from S.

In this case, the pleading is reversed:

1. Anyone called a deacon has an authoritative office, unless it is a female..
2. Phoebe is a deacon..
3. Therefore Phoebe must not have an authoritative office.).

That Paul would entrust this woman with delivering the letter to the Romans, and tell them to serve her needs, is in itself a testimony to her status even if all the preceding is ignored. Note also that she is the servant to the whole *ekklesia* in Cenchrea.

Then Paul mentions the familiar Priscilla and Aquila, calling both of them co-workers who risked their lives for him. And he adds that an *ekklesia* meets in their home, which we mentioned earlier. Then after naming others, including another woman, Paul mentions a couple named Andronicus and Junia. They are described as “outstanding among the apostles”, a statement that has been no small source of controversy, including a deliberate cover-up by those charged with providing the most accurate Greek text for translators. From [this source](#):

Epp shows that earlier editions of the UBS actually gave the unattested name Junias an A rating, claiming majuscule support for that ruling (when majuscules are unaccented!). Epp reveals (on p. 54) that, by Bruce Metzger’s own admission in his Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament (2nd ed), the UBS committee made their ruling based on the gender assumptions imposed by some members of the committee (Textual Commentary, p. 475). Also notable is the persistence of lexicons and other reference works in locating the name under the nominative masculine.

An indictment is made: “In broad terms, it is fair to say that to a large extent our modern lexica, grammars, and many commentaries, especially during the past century, have carried forward— indeed, have aided and abetted— the tradition of ‘Junias,’ masculine” (p. 58). Chapters 9 and 10 provide helpful charts (pp. 62, 63, 66) which offer appalling visual confirmation that an arbitrary shift away from seeing Junia as a woman took place in the histories of Greek texts and English translations. (Regrettably, Epp does not mention the TNIV’s correction of the NIV’s masculine mistake.)

Here we have clear proof of a female apostle, yet untold damage has been done by those who would dare to put their presumption (that God would never call a female an apostle) over inspired scripture, because this “gender bender” on Junia has stood for a very long time.

After listing many others whose names God saw fit to preserve in scripture, Paul warns against those who cause divisions. He had much to say about that to the Corinthians concerning whose followers they were, but here he connects it with any teachings that differ from what they had learned from him. Those pushing such

teachings are using flattery and smooth talk to deceive people. But when it comes to dividing up the Body, what has been more destructive than the clergy/laity class distinction? Close on its heels would be the male/female division, followed by denominational splits and various factions over the centuries. Paul tells us to **keep away from any who promote teachings that dismember the Body**. Will we heed Paul's warning or not?

The Teachings, Part Seven

Paul's letter to the Ephesians has as its primary theme the topic of relationships in Christianity. When we are saved we become "dead" to sin and "alive" to God; Jews and Gentiles no longer have a wall of separation between them, though neither becomes the other; we all relate to every other believer as a spiritual sibling. And notice in a well-known passage, Eph. 2:8-10, that we are saved to do good works, not that we do good works to be saved. It is we who are the spiritual Temple, rooted in love, such that there is no more need for a physical one. And note that Jesus, as the Cornerstone, is not on the roof but at the lowest point, supporting the rest of the building— something for advocates of hierarchy to consider.

It is impossible to read this letter without being impressed with the importance of humility and service. And as with the analogy of the human body, the one of a building shows that there is no hierarchy in the individual bricks, unique though each of them is. As with what Jesus had said about "not so with you", this arrangement is the complete opposite of that of the world. But in spite of that, some read Paul's list in 4:11 and see a chain of command, even though the purpose stated in the very next verse is for them to build up and equip all the people, with the goal of us all reaching unity in faith and knowledge. Sadly, most of our so-called Christian education never produces this ever-increasing knowledge, or we would have many teachers by now.

It is in Eph. 4:15-16 that we see confirmation of the idea that the head is seen as the source of life for the body, not as the boss; the head and body are one flesh. This is a common illustration of unity in Paul's letters, as the context in each case testifies. So when he describes the husband as the head of the wife in chapter five, he is speaking of unity of substance, not a chain of command. Unity and cooperation fill the letter, and this is the context of the passage we will now examine that has been a serious source of division in the Body.

Beginning in vs. 18 we see the beginning of a list, because the structure is "Be filled... talking... singing... giving thanks... supporting one another." Each of those phrases depends upon vs. 18 for its subject, and each phrase is a description of how we behave if we are filled with the Spirit. The last one, "supporting one another", is the Greek word *hupotasso* (see The Teachings, Part One), and once again it has nothing to do with an enforced chain of command but a voluntary support. Does not Jesus support the whole building? Yes, He rules it as God, but He also came down to our level in order to support— that is lift up— His bride.

Verse 22 is part of the same sentence and has no verb form at all, but simply adds "wives, to your own husbands, as to the Lord". Paul will continue the list, but he stops to elaborate on this point. Note first of all the curious addition of "own". After all, who else's husband should a wife be supportive of or attached to? And why is there no balancing command for husbands, per Paul's custom, since they are not excluded from the governing statement, "supporting one another"? This is one of

those places where knowledge of history has direct bearing on our interpretation of a passage.

Abuse of wives was a common practice. In fact, wife abuse was such a problem that in the early first century A.D., the Emperor Augustus devised a system called “marriage without hand” (*sine manu*) to protect women from husband abuse. **The law provided that the woman and her dowry remained under the jurisdiction of her father’s family.** A woman could be taken back by her family and married to another man if the husband mistreated her too severely. The law was intended to reduce the divorce rate and stabilize family life, but in fact only contributed to further instability in marriage. An historian of the first century claimed that “the only enduring relationship a married woman had was the one with her blood relatives;” not her husband... Marriage instructions were directed almost exclusively to the wife. She is to defer to the wishes of her husband, to worship his gods, to have no friends of her own, to understand and forgive his sexual relations with courtesans and men.

(emphasis mine; [source](#))

Now we know why Paul added the word “own”. The law was for a woman to be attached to her father, but Paul is telling Christian wives to be attached to their husbands, and he appeals to our unity with Jesus as the comparison. We left the world to become one with Jesus, and so contrary to the law, Christian women must leave their fathers and unite with their husbands. There was no need to say this to Christian men. In obvious contrast, were this a new law Paul was instituting, there would have been laws for both men and women.

Now for the elaboration on this item in the list. As always, Paul uses the body analogy to talk about unity, and he compares Jesus being the source of the *ekklesia* with the man being the source of the woman (the Greek words for man/husband are identical, as are the words for woman/wife). The reference to us as Christ’s body is obviously a metaphor, so we know the reference to the woman as the body is also a metaphor. And as we learned before, when the Greeks used “head” as a metaphor, it meant source or face, not boss. We cannot inject the divinity of Jesus into this head/body illustration. And so when we read vs. 24, which is Paul’s repetition (vs. 22-24 form what is called a *pericope* or contained unit of thought, with beginning and ending statements that act like bookends) of vs. 22, we must remember that the idea is of attachment and unity, not hierarchy.

With what we know about the historical situation, we can now understand more fully what Paul says to husbands in vs. 25-33 (another *pericope*, per previous note). Sandwiched between the statements about the requirement for a husband to love his wife as he loves himself are statements drawing from common experiences to convince husbands of how natural it should be to so love their wives. We see that Paul goes to great effort to emphasize this requirement, and the reason is because of what he had just said to wives. Since they were not to run back to their fathers for protection from abuse, Paul had to tell husbands about their side of this command. Without it, wives would be at the mercy of men whose culture gave them the right to beat and even kill their wives, and to cheat on them with impunity. So we do have balance in this: the wife is to be devoted to her husband as she is to the Lord, rather

than to her father, and so the husband is not to mistreat his wife but to love her as Christ loves the *ekklesia*.

But we must emphasize the fact that it is the **love** of Christ, **not His divine authority**, that the husband is to have. Paul is **not** telling husbands that they too have the power to make their wives holy, to cleanse them by washing and the Word, or to present them to God without flaw. Paul is simply listing things Christ did for all of us, His Body; he is most assuredly **not** equating men with Christ. Amazingly, it is this passage which is used to argue that men are bosses over their wives, and that a husband plays the role of Father to his wife's role of Son! Every believer is to follow the example of the humility of the Son; men are not excluded. Not once are any of us told to play God to another believer. And it is disgusting to try and model the husband/wife relationship after a parent/child relationship. It should go without saying that a wife is not her husband's child. The fact that such obvious things do have to be spelled out is a testament to the depths to which Christian theology has sunk.

Then Paul continues the list with instructions to children, parents, slaves, and masters. And we should note that the word translated "master" is identical to the one typically translated "lord". The word translated "slaves" is *doulous*, as opposed to *diakonos*, the difference being that *doulos* referred to the lowest of slaves, specifically the low-level rowers in a galley. This was hardly a position of honor and respect! Yet that is what a true slave of Jesus is, an under-rower, the lowest of the low. These are the ones Jesus said would be greatest in the kingdom of Heaven, and they are not found up on the bridge steering the ship, wearing titles and being saluted! Any believer who vies for that position is a usurper.

Paul's next letter was to Philemon, and once again we see that he does not pull rank but instead makes a request, asking to cash in on a favor. It's actually a little amusing the way Paul twists Philemon's arm, playing a sort of Jewish mother guilt game. But of course the point is that even when Paul has every right to boss someone, he never takes advantage of it.

Now to the letter to the Colossians. Once again we encounter the head/body metaphor, and once again we see the view that the body finds its life in the head, which came first. But he will say more about that shortly. In chapter two he warns against smooth talkers who would lead them astray, and note the details in vs. 8 about high-sounding philosophy and human traditions, which are worldly. But typical translations of vs. 10 would have us believe that there is such a thing as "head **over**", which would contradict what we know about the Greek metaphor. But the actual vocabulary is this:

who is the head of-every rule [*arche*] and authority [*exousia*]

Where is the word for "over"? It is not there. The phrase is "head **of**", not "head **over**". So the meaning here is not that Jesus is the boss over every other boss, even though we know that to be the case, but that Jesus is the originator and source of all rule and authority. This is, as we must carefully note, in the context of unity and identification with Jesus, who as Paul goes on to say, has made a spectacle of those

rulers, putting them on parade as a laughingstock. Again I ask those who crave rule over others: is this what you really want? It really is what you are asking for.

After all that about what Jesus has done for us and how we have been united with him, Paul refers back to it with “therefore” to show that it is the reason for our freedom and equality. Jesus did away with the old lines of authority and oppression, such that now, in Him, we are not to be put back under them in any way. Yet in spite of these explicit prohibitions, there is much effort made to judge believers in “what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day”. Why, in complete disregard of scripture, do these controllers prefer the shadow over the reality (vs. 17)? And how many cults and false religions have grown from the very thing Paul warns about in vs. 18 concerning those who claim to have been visited by angels? Such teachers are not connected to the Head and thus are not part of His Body. All those “do not’s” Paul lists have been turned into “do’s” by Christian leaders throughout history.

As with Gal. 3:28, Paul repeats in 3:11 that in Jesus there are to be no divisions by race, class, or anything else. If we were to choose one phrase to sum up the teachings of Paul concerning the community of believers, it would surely be “unity in the Spirit”. He goes on to list more of the “one anothers”, emphasizing our equality as well. Yet the controllers will still read vs. 18 in isolation, as if Paul has never mentioned the relationship between husband and wife before. They claim that since Paul only told wives to *hupotasso* and husbands to *agapao*, that this means husbands do not *hupotasso* and wives do not *agapao*! But he never made any disclaimers or exceptions in his many references to unity and equality, nor did Jesus grant exemption to anyone in the “not so with you” command. All believers must love; all must esteem others as better; all must support and unify. Paul is merely giving emphasis where there tends to be a problem.

The word translated “obey” for children and slaves is *hupakouo*, which as we learned before (see A New Creation) means to listen to or answer to. Why are these words being translated into English in a way that gives the reader the impression of blind subservience? Ask the controllers.

In his letter to the Philippians, the first thing Paul does is to identify himself as a *doulos*. How many leaders in Christendom would follow his example in practice? The test would be to see if their “service” would change if we took away the titles, offices, recognition, respect, salaries, and followers. And this time, along with the whole *ekklesia*, Paul does mention the guardians and servants. But again, they are not addressed exclusively.

While vs. 6 is typically cited in the matter of assurance of salvation, Paul isn’t even talking about that here. He has just praised the people for their partnership in the gospel, which cannot refer to salvation because salvation is something that happens at a point in time, not an ongoing process. Spiritual growth, on the other hand, certainly is a lifelong process, and we have work to do along the way. This is what Paul means by God finishing what He started.

Verses 15-18 is a good passage to remember when discussing what to do with people who teach correct doctrine but live in a way that denies the gospel. Paul is

happy that the truth is preached, but from all he has written we cannot think this means we must never criticize anyone as long as their message is Biblical. Certainly Paul would not recommend keeping such people in the fellowship, as we recall his instructions to the Corinthians. Bad behavior can be grounds for exclusion, but Paul would not chase them down outside the fellowship and tell them to be silent. Remember that we are to judge those among our own group.

As is his habit, Paul continues in ch. two with the message of unity, equality, love, and humility. If we truly value others as better than ourselves, we will not seek to rule over them or demand compliance with our personal convictions. This is where we are given one of the most powerful passages on what Jesus came to do, and it is a lesson in extreme humility. This is what those with power or privilege are to do; this is how we follow Jesus. He stooped down to lift us up, and served those He created. He did not jealously cling to that which was rightfully His, but laid it aside for a greater purpose, that of redeeming us.

But in vs. 12 we see yet another instance where *hupakouo* is translated as “obey”. Can anyone have any familiarity with the letters of Paul and think he suddenly decided to demand obedience? And would he also tell them to work for salvation, having made it more than clear that salvation is a gift? No, Paul has neither changed nor contradicted himself, and he even adds in vs. 13 that whatever work is being done, is being done by God. Salvation, which happens at a point in time, is then worked **out**, not **for**; our spiritual growth is the lifelong process that happens after salvation.

In chapter three Paul specifically warns against legalists, people who look on the flesh and want control over others. This sort of attitude angers Paul, as we can see in his calling them names! They are enemies within and they must be strongly opposed. As Paul has had to do before, he repeats the fact that if credentials were anything, he'd have them all. But, in the crudest possible terms, Paul now considers such credentials to be nothing but a pile of manure (the literal Greek meaning). His righteousness is not his own and neither is ours, so no one can brag about it. And again, in vs. 12-14 we see that Paul speaks of striving for a goal to win a prize, which cannot refer to a salvation that is a gift received by faith. When preachers keep their listeners in fear of not striving enough, of not doing enough, instead of motivating them with a desire to please their Savior, they show their ignorance of the nature of salvation, as well as the fact that works follow, not cause, salvation.

In vs. 17 Paul states the need for us to follow his example. Again, how is lording over in line with this? Paul never acted like a boss or pulled rank, so who is anyone else to do so? We are to keep a sharp eye on those who model the humility we see in scripture, and to oppose any who do not follow that example.

In the last chapter Paul mentions two women who are evidently arguing about something. Would their names be in scripture if this is just an ordinary dispute? Or, considering the context, can we presume that these women are elders whose examples are becoming marred by their differences? Paul calls them co-workers, so I think there is contextual support for this interpretation.

We have nearly completed our tour of the scriptures as they relate to the matter of power and control in Christianity, and so far we still have not encountered any support for such a thing. In fact, there has been much of the opposite, through both teachings and examples. If Paul really were trying to pass himself off as an authority, rule maker, boss, alpha, or any such thing, he has done the poorest job of it. His message is one of unity and equality, not hierarchy and its inherently divisive nature.

The Teachings, Part Eight

The last three of Paul's letters— 1 Timothy, Titus, and 2 Timothy— are the few that are addressed to individuals in a congregational setting, but even so these people are not resident leaders or authorities. Timothy and Titus were Paul's co-workers, fellow missionaries and travellers, and trusted companions. And neither of them is addressed as pastor, elder, or any other such title. So when these letters are referred to as the "pastoral epistles", it misleads people into thinking they are manuals for a CEO position in an organization.

Paul begins his first letter to Timothy by urging him to stay in Ephesus long enough to stop false teachers. The content of those teachings seems to be related to either Jewish myth or Gnosticism, or both. They have become a major distraction at the very least, but have progressed to the point where some have raised themselves up as teachers in the assembly. Yet these people are unqualified and ignorant of true doctrine, in spite of their self-confidence and aggressiveness. So stopping falsehood is the theme and purpose of the letter, and thus a critical component of the context.

From vs. 8-11 we can tell that this falsehood is related to law. The choice of words seems to indicate not Jewish law specifically, but law in general. But then Paul makes another important statement: that he had been shown mercy because he had sinned in ignorance when he was still in unbelief, and that what God had done for him was a pattern or example for future believers. God has mercy on people who do not sin with their eyes opened, but not for those who know what they are doing. An example of the latter was the case with the Pharisees, whose guilt Jesus assigned because of their claim to "see" (see The Teachings, Part One). We should recall that the man Paul mentioned in his letters to the Corinthians was never named, meaning it was not necessary for other believers to be on their guard against him, because he was not a false teacher. We will encounter this principle again shortly.

So Timothy is being charged, per vs. 18, with putting an end to this nonsense, in keeping with an unspecified prophecy about him. Note that in vs. 19 two men are named, and Paul says he has already "handed them over to Satan to be taught not to blaspheme". As with the man in 1 Corinthians, handing over to Satan is not indicative of lack of saving faith, and who but a believer needs to be taught a lesson about blasphemy? This is an internal matter, so these must be believers. But unlike the unnamed man, these are false teachers, which we know from what Paul is telling Timothy. The context of 1 Cor. was immorality, while the topic here is false teaching. So we see from Paul's examples that while there can be various reasons to expel someone from fellowship, only deliberate false teachers are named so that other believers know who not to trust.

Then in ch. two Paul says "therefore", referring back to what he has written about falsehood and those who promote it. He is now giving preventative measures, ways in which the people can protect themselves from future false teachers. But as we have already learned, if Paul specifies a weakness a group needs to work on, it is

not a blanket endorsement for people not in that group to freely indulge in it. For example, if one child out of a class is misbehaving, the whole class does not need a lecture, but only the child who is misbehaving. And of course this in no way means the rest of the class is free to misbehave! Yet when it comes to scripture, many interpreters do believe that if only certain people are restrained in a matter, that other people are not so restrained.

This is no more evident than in 1 Tim. 2. Paul tells men to pray without contention, but that hardly means women are allowed to pray with contention. Likewise, when he tells women to be modest and moral, it hardly means that men have no requirement to be modest and moral. But it is significant that Paul assigns to Christian women at least one quality which, in that culture, was thought to be the sole domain of men: wisdom. While some teachers today would turn a Christian woman into a mere empty shell whose only purpose in life is to serve a man, Paul urges her to be wise. And again, it is not only Christian women who need to be moral and pure and wise. These are universal Christian virtues, not his and her virtues.

Now in vs. 11-15 we arrive at the counterpart to the controversy found in Eph. 5. Remember that to this point the topic has been remedies for false teaching, and while Paul will address several subtopics as he goes along, we cannot ignore the purpose of the letter as if some parts were written in a vacuum. This section is clearly a unit, being between instructions to various groups before it and a discussion of requirements for being a guardian after it. But it is in the context of stopping falsehood, not truth. That hardly seems necessary to point out, until we encounter some of the desperate interpretations of this passage.

First of all, Paul suddenly switches from plural (women) to singular (a/the woman). But as we have observed in his other letters, he does not randomly shift between the two, and he is known to use impersonal nouns when he does not wish to name someone. But many translations hide this fact and change the meaning of the passage by altering the grammatical number and even some pronouns. Here is the literal rendering:

woman in quietness let-her-be-learning in all subjection to-be-teaching yet to-woman not I-am-permitting not-yet to-be-domineering of-man but to-be in quietness

Woman is singular, as we said. Quietness is the word *hesuchia*, and while some claim it means complete silence, most agree that it means in a quiet and respectful manner. All students were to have this attitude, and this same word is found in 1 Peter 3:4 which makes the second meaning obvious (“a meek and *hesuchia* spirit” cannot mean “a meek and completely silent spirit”— unless one wishes to turn this ordinary word into a technical term for emptying the mind as in Hinduism, i.e. “the silence” or “the cloud of unknowing”. But of course neither meaning fits the context in 1 Peter 3:4.). Then Paul commands the woman to learn, a radical idea for the time. The word for subjection is *hupotage*, meaning the respect a student is to have for their teacher. There is no identification of the person to be subjected to or respectful of, although many presume that it must mean all women to all men. But no such thing is warranted by this passage. So this first sentence, vs. 11, reads, “The woman must learn, and in a respectful and humble way.” So the woman in question is not

named, and she is commanded to sit quietly to learn. This tells us that she is teaching falsehood, and doing so out of ignorance.

Now Paul begins vs. 12 with “But”, so he is about to put a restriction on her. In other words, she has been given permission to do one thing (learn), but now she will have permission denied on another thing. But this sentence is in the form of an idiom, which means a method of expression that is more than the sum of its grammatical components. The form “yet... not... not yet...” (*de... ouk... oude...*) means “not this, nor yet that”. In English we might say to a child who has violated a rule, “You aren’t even allowed to go to the end of the street, much less to the concert tonight!”

Now we understand vs. 12 to read, “I am not even giving her permission to teach, much less to oppressively control the man! She must quite down.” Here we have another unnamed person, a man, and this woman is oppressively controlling him. The Greek word there is *authentain*, a rare word in classical literature of the time and used only in this spot in the entire NT. Its literal meaning has to do with murder or violent overtaking, with some translations choosing to render it as domineer. What it certainly does **not** mean is any and all authority; we have already seen the more common Greek words for that. And Paul uses one of them, *epitrepo*, in this very sentence when he says “I am not permitting”. So what she is being denied is permission to teach, especially not to oppressively control.

Again, this does **not** mean that men are allowed to oppressively control other men! No believer is allowed to do this, but not all of them are doing so in Ephesus at this time. Like the one child who needs the reprimand for misbehaving, the one woman teaching falsehood and oppressively controlling a man is the one being reprimanded. It is the worst kind of scripture twisting to turn these two sentences into a universal and timeless rule prohibiting all godly Christian women for all time from teaching truth!

But the objection will come in spite of all that, “In the next sentence Paul appeals to Genesis, so this is a universal and timeless prohibition.” Ah, but we know Genesis better than that, and we know Paul well enough to state that he would not make up a new law or interpretation into the OT. What is the topic here? False teaching. What kind of person does Paul not name? The deceived or ignorant. What does the passage in Genesis to which he refers talk about? Deception. He writes,

adam for first was-molded thereafter eve and adam not was-seduced the yet woman being-completely-seduced in transgression has-become

Note several important things here. Paul is talking about creation order, which we know from our study of Genesis has nothing whatsoever about authority; it is simply a sequence or chronology. But then he follows that immediately with “and Adam was not deceived.” So Paul ties creation order to **deception**, not to hierarchy; he agrees with our assessment of the Genesis account. But what, we may ask, does creation order have to do with deception? Adam knew from personal experience that God had the power to create, while Eve, the last one created, did not. She was inexperienced and therefore vulnerable to the idea that she really could be like God. Adam had no such vulnerability, not by his being male, but by his first-hand

observation of what God could do. This makes perfect sense out of what Paul is saying here.

Now turn your attention to the fact that Paul, right in the middle of a thought, turns from naming Adam (twice) and Eve (once), to using the impersonal noun (the woman). Does he mean, as some assert, all women? No, Paul's use of grammar in all his other writings does not allow it. And we must consider also the fact that the word for "has become" is in a form that means a past action with continuing results. In other words, whoever "the woman" is, **she is still in sin!** Some try to twist this to mean that Eve's sin has its continuing results in the present, but that would lead us to the absurd conclusion that either Eve is still sinning, or only women suffer for her sin. But what does scripture say about the sins of Adam and Eve? At whose feet does Paul lay all the blame for the entrance of sin into the world? Adam. Nothing is ever said, anywhere in scripture, about anyone suffering the effects of the sin of Eve. And we have already dealt with the fact that God did not curse her, much less only her daughters.

We should note also that in 2 Cor. 11:3, Paul feared that all the Corinthian believers, not just the women, had been deceived by the serpent's cunning just as Eve had been. If deception were the sole domain of women, Paul just contradicted himself. And who would claim that only women can be deceived, or that only men can guard them from it? Our experiences alone would be enough to refute the idea that women are intrinsically deceivable in a way that men intrinsically are not. As with Adam and Eve, deception is a matter of experience, not biology.

Now we come to vs. 15, and there we see another word used rarely in classical literature of the time and only this one spot in the entire NT: *teknogonias*, literally "the parenting of children". The whole verse reads as follows:

she-shall-be-being-saved yet through the parenting-of-children if-ever they-should-be-remaining in faith and love and holiness with sanity

What does "saved" mean here? Some say that the Greek word always refers to salvation from eternal wrath, but that would only be true if we knew from every instance Paul uses it that the context is clearly on that topic. Here, not only is such a thing not clear, but it would constitute a salvation by works— and works of the strangest nature! But since the topic is deception and ignorance, we can safely assume that it is those things the woman will be rescued from. And as for "the parenting of children", some say it refers to The Childbearing, that is, the birth of Jesus. But if the salvation mentioned here is not from eternal wrath then this meaning for *teknogonias* does not match. In addition, there is not one other instance in the NT where salvation from eternal wrath is described in terms of Jesus' birth; it is always in conjunction with His death and resurrection.

So this woman, deceived and in sin, will be rescued from both through some kind of parenting or patient instruction, and as the remainder of the verse tells us, it has to do with "they" remaining in faith etc. Note the shift within one sentence between "she" and "they"; does this, as some assert, make "she" mean all women? No, the grammar does not allow it. For example: If we want to talk about a group of women, we might say, "A woman has fallen into sin. But if any woman repents she will..."

What we would not say is, “A woman has fallen into sin. But if she repents they will...”. Neither does Paul write so poorly as to use she/they when he means they/they.

The only option the grammar will give us is this: “she” is the unnamed woman Paul has been talking about. But who then are “they”? The only other person mentioned in this passage is the man that this woman is controlling. Some think it could possibly refer to the whole congregation, but Paul has not mentioned them in this section which we already determined is a unit of its own. Another aspect of the she/they question is that it is a conditional statement; that is, “she will **if** they”. Whoever “she” is, and whatever this salvation is, it depends upon the actions of “they”. This is another obstacle for the view that Paul is talking about all women, because it would mean that women can only be saved if **all** Christian women **remain** faithful.

Which raises yet another question, if the woman is unsaved: how can she remain in faith if she has not yet entered into it? “They” are people who are already in faith, already saved. So then we must also ask how any woman could be saved by the actions of others. The only clear and plain thing about this passage is that it becomes a hopelessly tangled mess if we think Paul is talking about all women!

That was a lot of detail, so let’s put these verses together in a way that does not violate the rules of Greek grammar or make Paul contradict himself:

That woman you asked me about must learn, and in a respectful and humble way. I am not even giving her permission to teach, much less to oppressively control the man! She must quite down. For Adam was formed first and then Eve, and Adam was not deceived. But this woman, being completely deceived, has fallen into sin. In spite of that, she will be rescued from her deception by means of the proper spiritual upbringing, as long as they both remain in faith and love and wisdom.

At last we are ready to move on to the next section, but immediately we find ourselves embroiled in yet another controversy, this time on alleged “offices” in the *ekklesia*. First up is 1 Tim. 3, where Paul instructs Timothy about overseers. The Greek word is *episcopo* and it means to supervise or watch over (lit., to look upon). But rather than the English connotation of an overseer being a boss, the Greek word is better rendered as a guardian. A guard is not a boss but a protector, watching over the area to be protected. Cities and nations do not put their kings and rulers on the perimeter as guards! While the guards are ultimately responsible for the safety of all within that perimeter, they do not have authority over anything or anyone within it; their authority is restricted to the perimeter itself.

So when scripture talks about guards, it talks about protectors, not bosses. And Paul tells Timothy that anyone (Gk. *tis*; the word for man or male is not there) who aspires (note: **not** feels called) to be a guardian, has a noble aspiration. Notice that though Paul uses singular pronouns throughout this passage (vs. 1-7), he prefaces it with “anyone”, and does not use the “a woman” or “a man” construction seen before. So this is not a particular individual, but a hypothetical one. And though some insist that the use of masculine pronouns must denote that only males are in view here, Greek

will use the masculine as long as there is or can be at least one male in the group. Also, we must understand that English is practically the only language in the world that does not make extensive use of grammatical gender. For example, in Greek the grammatical gender for the Spirit is neuter, and in Hebrew it is feminine. That is to say, grammatical gender has absolutely no indication of biological gender.

But the objection will be raised, “Verse two specifies that a guard must be the husband of one wife.” The answer is that this is an idiom, a concept we covered a short while ago. Here is some documentation concerning this phrase: ([source](#))

Paul’s instruction includes only three words, “mias gunaikos andra,” as one of several requirements for being an elder (1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:6) or a deacon (1 Tim. 3:12, where the pl. “andres” is used). “Gune” refers to any adult female, including wives and widows. The King James Version translates it “woman” 129 times and “wife” 92 times. The noun “gunaikos” is in the genitive and therefore deals with attribution. It may refer to relationship or quality, for “the genitive defines by attributing a quality or relationship to the noun which it modifies.” Dana and Mantey define the genitive as “the case which specifies with reference to class or kind.” The genitive here is used to define or describe the noun “aner.” This should not be considered a possessive genitive, for that would mean that the word in the genitive indicates one who owns or possesses the noun it modifies. In that case the translation would be “a man owned by one woman.” Nor can this be considered as a genitive of relationship (“a man who has [possesses] one wife”) for there is no indication within the phrase or context that that relationship is implied. **It is best to understand this “gunaikos” as being a genitive of quality, that is, giving a characteristic to the noun it modifies.** The noun being modified is “andra,” accusative singular of “aner.” “Aner” is translated “man” 156 times in the King James version and “husband” only 50 times (including the passage under discussion). This accusative functions here as an object of the main verb “be” along with a long list of other accusative nouns and participles. Stated simply, the clause is “Therefore... an elder must be... a man...” The words “one woman” modify “man” to explain what kind, or to qualify the noun by attributing to him this character, Robertson adds that the genitive of quality (also called attributive genitive). “expresses quality like an adjective indeed, but with more sharpness and distinctness.” He also points out that usually the genitive follows the limiting substantive, “but the genitive comes first if it is emphatic,” is the case here. Since the other qualification in 1 Timothy 3 deal with the man’s **character** and since the grammatical structure is more naturally consistent with this emphasis, it seems best to understand the phrase as meaning that he is a one-woman type of man. (emphasis mine)

In other words, this person must be faithful to their spouse. So Paul, as is clear from the whole passage, is emphasizing the person’s quality of character, not their flesh. And the list of qualities is that which all believers should strive for, but which any who desire to guard must have attained. In contrast, if we take it literally, not only does this guardian have to be male, he must also be married and have children. This would disqualify Paul himself, as well as Timothy! If one of the qualities Paul lists must be taken literally, then so must the others; there would be no justification for excluding them. Ignorance of Greek expressions has been known to lead to such

ridiculous questions as, “Does this mean a man can only have ever been married once, or that he can only have one wife at a time? Can he be divorced? Must he have children?” If we would just remember that God does not play favorites and does not judge by the external, (Rom. 2:11, 1 Sam. 16:7) we would avoid much needless speculation and division.

Another point in that section is the warning against approving novices as guardians. It would be interesting to study the average age of seminary graduates, and I think such a study would show that by and large Christianity has completely ignored this warning. And have we ever seen a “pastor” told to step down because his children are unruly? Or because he has a bad reputation with unbelievers? The number of scandals involving such people has been alarmingly high, but we can be sure we’re only seeing the tip of the iceberg. Once again we see that these allegedly male-only verses are applied selectively, which is to say, with a double standard. If the whole passage were taken literally it would disqualify a great number of those currently employed as church bosses.

Then Paul goes on to talk about *diakonos*, typically transliterated for males or when the interpreter thinks a “church office” is in view, but always translated as “servant” when a female is involved. But in this context we can see that Paul does address these *diakonos* separately as males and females. Notice, however, that just as Paul says “likewise” to connect the qualifications for the *diaconos* with those of the *episcopos*, he also uses it to connect the male and female *diaconos*. That is, just as male servants are to have the same quality of character as guardians, the same is true for female servants. And it is all about the inner person, not the flesh.

Another Greek word we need to pay attention to is *proistemi*, typically translated as to rule. This same root is used in Rom. 16:1 of Phoebe, and we learned that she “stood before” many, that is, she protected them with benevolent rule. If this word does indicate an office, then we have scriptural proof that women could hold such an office; male supremacism cannot have it both ways, calling a *prostatis* a ruler for males and a helper for females.

I think, given the context of each instance of the word, that the best rendering in English is “to provide and protect”, and that is what Paul is saying here about how anyone desiring to guard must be treating their own family. A person who neglects their own people is not fit to protect the community of believers. Or as Paul will say in 1 Tim. 5:8, such a person is worse than an unbeliever! Notice also in vs. 12-13 that Paul repeats the requirement of faithfulness and provision, giving us the beginning and ending of the topic.

In vs. 15 Paul makes a statement that can be taken one of two ways: either he has been telling Timothy how to conduct himself, or he has been telling him how everyone should conduct themselves. Now some take the whole phrase including “in the household of God” as that Paul is making rules of conduct for “church services” or “sanctuaries”. But not only does Paul never mention such entities, the context of this letter is stopping falsehood, so the instructions he has been giving are ways in which Timothy is to make that happen, and to prevent it from happening again. The requirements for guardians are for that very purpose, as well as what Timothy himself is to do. So rather than behavior rules in a traditional church setting, these

are ways of protecting the community of believers and keeping it pure. Paul even explicitly states what he means by “household of God” in vs. 15b: the *ekklesia* of the living God.

In the next section beginning with ch. four, Paul goes back to the main topic of false teachings. Some of the hallmarks we can look for include hair-splitting legalism (the accurate meaning of *hupokrisis*, typically rendered “hypocrisy”), forbidding marriage (e.g. a celibate priesthood), and commanding abstinence from certain foods (e.g. vegetarianism).

Note that in vs. 6 Paul refers to Timothy as a *diakonos*, not a pastor or bishop or the leader of that congregation. Then in vs. 12 he tells him to be an example in word and deed. This is the common theme in all Paul’s letters: Christian ambition should always seek the lowest place of service, and the highest standards of conduct. Christianity, and the world it is supposed to be affecting, would be much different if this foundational principle were to be adopted on a grand scale.

In chapter five Paul gives general instructions for Timothy to give to various groups. In vs. 1 we see the word *presbuteros*, the same word also translated as “elders” in many places. Its precise meaning is determined by context, so when the context is unclear we must impose our personal preference and call it “the plain reading”. And by this particular context, we can see that Paul is telling Timothy to treat older men and women with dignity (he uses both the male and female forms of the word), because it is part of a list that includes all other groups of people.

Now Paul addresses the situation with widows. At that time a widow was at the mercy of family for her support, and Paul makes it clear that if a widow has believing relatives, they must see to her needs and not burden the *ekklesia* with them. But if she has no relatives yet squanders whatever aid she receives, the *ekklesia* must not support her. In other words, character still matters. On the other hand, as we mentioned a short time ago, believers who refuse to care for their own are worse than unbelievers. Then Paul adds one more stipulation for supporting widows, that being a minimum age of 60. Does that mean we are to follow this age limit slavishly, and disregard all the great differences between that society and our modern western one? Not at all; we must take these instructions in the spirit they were intended. Yet at the same time, we must be careful to draw the line in the right place. There is still need to refuse aid to the irresponsible or to those who have family.

It is interesting to note that in vs. 9 we see the mirror image of the one about “a one-woman man”— and this is describing **unmarried** women! The Greek words are *heis aner gune*, or “one-man woman”. Again, no matter what the order of the words, the phrases describe character, not gender roles. Or would someone actually interpret this verse as that only widows have to have good deeds, while widowers do not? These, as always, are universal Christian qualities, so Paul is emphasizing the importance of character, as is his continual practice. He does not ignore the culture but advises believers on how to conduct themselves within it.

Now we encounter another controversy starting with vs. 16. Paul gives reasons for denying younger widows the support of the *ekklesia*, but some take him to mean that only women are prone to such things as being idle (but see 1 Thes. 5:14 and 2 Thes.

3:6), meddling (1 Pet. 4:15), or gossiping (Rom. 1:29, 2 Cor. 12:20). However, as those references show, men are every bit as vulnerable to such things. And remember that Paul always portrays singleness as the ideal state for a believer, such that if he is now commanding all widows under 60 to marry, he is contradicting himself. Instead, remembering context, he is still dealing with how Timothy must stop what's going on there in Ephesus, listing problems specific to them. The principles Paul uses to deal with these things can certainly be **adapted** to other cultures and times and congregations, but they are certainly not rules etched in stone that ignore specific situations.

Now back to the topic of leaders, specifically elders. This is the word *presbuteros* again, but in a different immediate context, denoted clearly by the phrase which the TNIV renders “direct the affairs of the church”. But the word there is *proistemi*, which as we have learned means to protect and provide. At any rate, the main point of contention here is what Paul means by saying such people are “worthy of double honor”. The following statement about workers and wages is typically presumed to mean a paid position, since that is the literal and primary meaning. But again, look at the context, and also ask this question: If elders get double pay, then who gets single pay? Where did Paul ever set down a pay scale— and if he had, would we be consistently literal and demand that they be paid in ancient currency?

The answer is right there for us, in vs. 19. Paul is talking about what it should take to even consider any accusation made against an elder. Remember that elders are those who have attained by word and deed a reputation as spiritually mature and rightly interpreting the scriptures. Such would be very unlikely to be guilty of petty accusations, so Paul is simply saying that these people deserve some respect. Double honor means, then, that no one should be quick to accuse an elder.

But as is Paul's custom, he quickly adds balance to that statement. While it requires more than ordinary evidence to accuse an elder, once such evidence is obtained the guilty elder must pay a heavier than ordinary penalty; that is, greater honor also means greater punishment. Such guilty elders are to be publicly rebuked as a warning for everyone else (or possibly, the rest of the elders). But rarely is this practiced. Most erring “pastors” are quietly shuttled out of town, or their sins are swept under the rug. Even worse is the increasing habit of excusing such sins as the privilege of “God's Anointed”, combined with making it a sin to accuse them in the first place.

This highlights another of Paul's statements that is widely ignored: to do everything without prejudice or showing favoritism (vs. 21). Once again Paul stresses unity and equality, mutual love and consistent standards, and does not grant a pass to elders or males or even Jews. Another ignored verse is 22, where Paul warns against appointing anyone to a responsible task if they are a new believer, and that anyone who does it anyway shares in that person's guilt. Seminaries and the young people they “ordain”, take warning!

In chapter six we again encounter the word *doulos*, and their masters are called *despotes* (also translated as lord, manager, or steward). The same word is used in 1 Tim. 5:14 in the discussion of young widows, where they are encouraged to have children and to be the *oikodespoteo*, which is literally “house despot”. Some claim

that the man is the master of the house or head of the family, but scripture never says so, and as we see here only the wife and mother is described as such. The erroneous view that a man is the head of his family comes only from Paul's letter to the Corinthians as a preface for head coverings, (see The Teachings, Part Five) and along with the discussion there we should note that even with the wrong interpretation, being head of a wife does not make one head of the entire family. And what Paul is telling Timothy here is of course not an endorsement of slavery, but as with other topics, he is instructing him in the way believers are to deal with this social institution.

As Paul winds down this letter, we see another instance where he is very hard on those within the community of believers who ignore sound teachings. This is hardly surprising, given the overall motive for writing the letter, that being to stop false teachings. But the point here is that Paul minces no words when dealing with those on the inside. Then he gives Timothy a strong charge to do what needs to be done, to be found faithful in his service. But notice also in these final paragraphs that Paul does not call being rich a sin (nor does he ever tell believers to strive for poverty!), but only tells people of means to be good stewards.

Lastly, in vs. 20 we see a possible reference to Gnosticism in the phrase, "what is falsely called knowledge". The Greek word is *gnosis*, the base from which Gnosticism is derived. Gnosticism turns this ordinary word into a special and mystical body of knowledge or level of spirituality obtained only by an elite. That Paul would summarize this letter with such a reference, being something Timothy needs to guard against, is a warning we all need to heed, especially in this modern time of the resurgence of mysticism in the forms of contemplative prayer, labyrinths, "the silence" (remember the word *hesuchia?*), etc. Christianity today seems more intent upon studying the writings of these thinly-veiled Gnostics than the scriptures.

The Teachings, Part Nine

Shortly after writing the letter to Timothy, Paul wrote this one to Titus, and it too was sent for a very specific purpose, at a point in history, concerning a specific location. Paul cuts right to the chase in stating that purpose: for Titus to appoint elders in each city. Right away we recognize the word “elders” and remember that it can mean either older people or the spiritually mature who guard a congregation. In this case, we know it means the latter because they are appointed, which could not be true concerning the aged.

The word translated as to appoint or ordain is *kathistemi*. There was no ceremony or official function involved in this appointment; it was simply a matter of recognizing the spiritually mature in such a way as to let the people know who met the standard, and thus who they could trust for both correct doctrine and models of exemplary Christian living. And in the detailed list of criteria Paul specifies, he begins with that familiar phrase that means “a faithful spouse”, that is, the character of one who is faithful and morally pure. We also see another reference to good parenting, along with many other excellent qualities. We have gone over the implications of such requirements before, but the important thing is that they are indeed requirements for being a guardian. Yet Christianity has treated them more like mild suggestions or showed utter contempt for them in practice.

The main problem there in Crete seems to have been similar to that of Ephesus, focusing on legalism and immorality, as well as general laziness and irresponsibility. Paul singles out those from “the circumcision”, meaning legalists bent on forcing all Christians to adhere to Jewish law, and he accuses such teachers of being motivated by greed. Note once again how harsh Paul is on such people inside the *ekklesia*; he does not give them an inch. Then in vs. 16 he repeats his common theme of actions having to match words.

The first eight verses of chapter two form a chiasm (see the chapter on Genesis) as follows:

- Titus, be the example
- --Male elders
- ----Female elders
- --Male elders
- Titus, be the example

Which meaning should we understand about the word *presbuteros* (male and female forms) in this passage? Is it really about the elderly? Remember the purpose and theme of the letter, which is to appoint elders. Paul would not have completely changed the subject this soon, especially in such a short letter. No, these are the appointees of chapter one. But what of the word for “young”? It is *neos* which, like *presbuteros*, has two possible meanings depending on context: young or new. Since we know that these are the appointed elders, and since Paul is matching the *neos* to the *presbuteros*, then the ones they are to train must be new, not simply young. In

other words, the appointed elders are to train the new believers. And in keeping with societal taboos, it is appropriate for the male elders to teach the new male believers, and female elders to teach the new female believers.

Note that most of the detail is for the female elders, which is the focal point of the chiasm. From what Paul says here we can deduce that female elders had a bigger job cut out for them. The women of Crete were neglecting their homes and were clueless about raising children. Unlike the men of their society, they were not trained in any moral disciplines and so had no role models of honorable women to follow. Since Titus, being a man, could not provide a complete role model, he was to appoint women as elders who could. And in addition to that which the men were to teach, the women had to teach basic domestic skills and acceptable behavior. You might say the women of Crete needed a course in Remedial Home Economics.

Incredibly, the usual interpretation of this passage is that old women were **only** allowed to teach young women, while ignoring the fact that this would also mean old men were **only** allowed to teach young men. If the latter is wrong then so is the former; male supremacism cannot have it both ways. Neither does this passage mean that women are only to learn domestic skills, as if women of all cultures and times need the *ekklesia* to teach them these things. And again, we note that these women are to *hupotasso* their husbands—and also to love them (although the word here is *philandros* as opposed to *agape*).

But we need to examine one more thing before moving on. Verse 3 is translated as that the female elders are to behave in a “reverent” manner. (One must stop and ask, what about the men? Are they not to live in a reverent manner as well?) But the Greek phrase here is *katastemati hieroprepeis* and shares the same root as the word *kathistemi* in ch. 1, meaning to appoint. The two words together mean to behave in a manner in keeping with a sacred appointment. This is additional support for taking the words *presbuteros* and *neos* to mean appointed elders and new believers. So these female elders were definitely the appointees of chapter one and not merely older women.

Starting in vs. 9 we see familiar instructions concerning slaves (*doulos*) and masters (*despotes*), and that the slaves are to *hupotasso* their masters. And as always, they are to behave in a manner consistent with that required of all believers. Chapter three begins with an instruction for all the people to *hupotasso* their *arche* and *exousia*, which reinforces our understanding of the Greek words for authority. And it is clear from context that this is all in reference to secular law, not the *ekklesia*.

After more familiar general instructions, Paul tells Titus that a divisive person is to be expelled after two warnings. We must remember that division is not just a matter of quarrels about various topics, but also about the worldly notion of hierarchy that divides “clergy” and “laity”, male and female, Jew and Gentile. Can we just ignore Paul’s teachings on this, simply because of how long this has been going on? Would we also allow a thief to continue stealing if they had been at it for a certain length of time? Then what is stopping us from expelling those who carve up the Body of Christ? We have the authority and mandate of scripture, as well as the duty and responsibility, to put this into practice. And if anyone refuses to obey this scripture, let them also stop abusing scripture and turning it into a weapon of conquest over

other believers. If they don't intend to obey scripture, then let them keep their hands off of it.

The last of the doctrinal letters is the second one Paul wrote to Timothy. It is a much more personal letter, written as the final instruction from a seasoned teacher to his prized pupil and good friend. Timothy is instructed to keep repeating what he has learned and to guard against distractions. But we need to clear up another instance of male supremacism in chapter two. Vs. 2 says to pass on these teachings to faithful people. The word for males is not there; it is the generic word meaning people.

In 2:17 Paul names names again, and he explicitly states that these men have departed from the truth and so must have had it at one time. That is, they are deliberate false teachers in the assembly and they must be exposed and expelled. But notice the content of the false teaching in this case: they were filling people with fear that they had missed the resurrection of the last days. In a slight twist on this theme, today there are many who teach that there will be no literal last days, no Rapture, no wedding feast, no return of the King. And what is the result of this sort of teaching? Paul says that it subverts the faith of some. This is a very serious falsehood.

Then in vs. 24 we see another verse that, ironically, is used as a club to beat those who confront error and name false teachers. What Paul is saying in vs. 24-26 is that a true servant does not make a habit of fighting and dividing (something many preachers today need to grasp), not that all believers are to be completely gagged such that they can never utter a negative word for any reason. We have seen through Paul's own example that error in the Body must be forcefully opposed, but also that the deceived, the victims, the ignorant, the humble, are to be treated with gentleness and compassion. Paul even describes the people in this case as having been snared by the devil, so we know he is not talking about those who knowingly subvert the truth, like the men he named earlier.

Chapter three, as many have observed, is like reading today's news. But in vs. 6 Paul uses another expression mistaken to paint women as silly and gullible. As we have seen before, this is just another idiom. This particular one refers to people who are easy prey for any smooth talker that comes along. And it is likely that the people in vs. 7 are the not the prey but the predators, especially since the surrounding verses all focus on the teachers.

Verse 2 of chapter four states a point made earlier, that there are times to rebuke, and that this has to be done while people might still listen. But as we know all too well, many today have indeed plugged their ears and shut their eyes to the truth, and they are turning to myths in great numbers, even in "the church". In following verses Paul will again name names, and in vs. 14 he even wishes revenge from God upon one of them.

Paul also speaks of reward, which we know refers to an earned wage and not salvation. His reward will come in heaven because he did not accept compensation on earth, a lesson for those who demand salaries. And he adds that this reward will

also be for all who long for the return of Jesus. There are many today who want Him to wait, or not to come at all, because their hearts are set on this life.

Summary

We have completed our tour of the scriptures, studying the topic of power and control in Christianity along the way. We learned that much of what is presumed is without foundation, while much more that has been “lost in translation”— whether through ignorance or deliberate prejudice— is now being brought to light.

We have learned that God is not one to play favorites, nor to judge people by appearances. Neither does he tell us of His love and compassion for all, only to take it away from some groups on the basis of the flesh. He does not promise an easy burden and then make it heavier, adding harsher rules for His Body than for anyone else. And He does not lead only by command but also by example.

Jesus modeled the ideal life of a believer— for everyone. There are no exemptions, no roles to play, no chains of command among brothers and sisters or among the parts of the Body. A healthy body is composed of parts that truly complement each other as one hand or foot complements the other, with neither wishing to rule over the other. And no part has to ask another part to communicate with the Head.

Yet the controlling spirit would dismember this Body into a thousand pieces. It pits male against female and invents class distinctions. It wants one part to boss another and puts barriers between believers and their Savior. It distracts and sidetracks, it weighs the Body down with chains and burdens. It is an evil cancer that eats away from within and keeps the Body sick and immobile. It cannot leave people alone. It even protects itself by repeating the lie that the opposite of control must be chaos, as if people cannot get along without some kind of pecking order, or as if the Spirit cannot direct us without human bosses.

But it does not have to be this way. The cure is only as far away as our resolve to follow what scripture actually states, whether by word or by example. All we lack is the conviction to put the truth into action. And of course we must remember that very few have been made aware of all these issues, such that we need to allow time for this message to spread and sink in. God never suddenly yanks people into line but waits patiently, slowly revealing His will, gradually introducing changes. In the same way, we who know the truth must first of all preach it, then keep teaching it, and then be alert for readiness to move forward.

We hear a lot about change today, but it is a lie that would only serve to enslave us again. True and lasting improvement will only come with the message of our freedom in Jesus, with careful examination of the Bible, with respect for the Word of God and with consistent practice. Let us begin to model this healthy Body by uniting around the truth and behaving in a way that will cause those around us to see what Jesus really began, what the Holy Spirit gave birth to.

Be the Body, a true community of believers, united in love and truth, unencumbered by the chains of control. Seek out like-minded others and faithful teachers of the Word, and change the world in the way we were meant to: one person at a time.

Appendix: The Trinity

While all branches of Christianity that are considered “mainstream” or orthodox have agreed that there is one God in three Persons, there were debates early in Christian history concerning this aspect of the nature of God. But until the last few decades there was little interest in continuing the debates. Now the topic has returned, and it is very much a symptom of the controllers’ drive for hierarchy in all things, even extending to God Himself.

Let us examine the scriptures to see what they say about the Trinity, beginning with the Old Testament:

Listen to me, Jacob, Israel, whom I have called: I am he; I am the first and I am the last. My own hand laid the foundations of the earth, and my right hand spread out the heavens; when I summon them, they all stand up together. Come together, all of you, and listen: Which of the idols has foretold these things? The LORD’s chosen ally will carry out his purpose against Babylon; his arm will be against the Babylonians. I, even I, have spoken; yes, I have called him. I will bring him, and he will succeed in his mission. Come near me and listen to this: From the first announcement I have not spoken in secret; at the time it happens, I am there. And now the Sovereign LORD has sent me, endowed with his Spirit. (Isaiah 48:12-16)

In addition we have the well-known text of Ps. 2:7, quoted also in Acts 13:33, Heb. 1:4-6, and Heb. 5:5: “You are my son; today I have become your father”. The NT of course makes the Trinity clear, especially in passages such as Mt. 3:16-17 where all three are mentioned in one sentence at the same time, thereby precluding Modalism. And in rebuttal to the charge of tritheism we have passages like John 1:18, 10:30-33, 17:21-23, Phil. 2:6, Col. 1:15-20, and Heb. 1:3.

The eternal and unchanging nature of God is of a compound One, not a “group”. While the details of how this One functions are beyond our grasp, it is a fact nonetheless. But what can we learn from scripture to tell us about how the three Persons relate to each other?

The first act of God was to create all that exists, per Gen. 1 and 2. The word there for God in the Hebrew is *Elohim*, a plural noun. We also see both singular and plural pronouns used there for God. Yet we also know that the Spirit was involved in creation (Gen. 1:2), and that Jesus was the Creator, per Col. 1:15-20. In Deut. 32:6 we read that the Father was the Creator. So we conclude from scripture that the Father, Son, and Spirit are the Creator; that is, the “role” of Creator is shared by all of the Persons.

Now let’s look at the incarnation of Jesus. Who exactly “fathered” him? In Luke 1:35 the angel tells Mary that “the Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you”, and Mt. 1:18 says Mary “was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit”. So there are two Persons cited as conceiving the body of

Jesus, one obviously the Spirit, and since Jesus is the one being conceived, that leaves the other as the Father.

What about the resurrection of Jesus? Acts 2:24 and many others say God (Gk. *theos*, not *pater*) raised Jesus; Gal. 1:1 specifies that it was the God the Father (Gk. *theos pater*); John 2:19-21 has Jesus saying he'd raise himself.

So are the Persons of the Trinity confined to strict and mutually-exclusive "roles"? We've already seen overlap in creation, conception, and resurrection. Now let's look at interactions among them, along with other attributes that help define their scope of activities.

- The Father sends the Son— 1 John 4:14
- The Father sends the Spirit— Luke 11:13, John 14:26
- The Father glorifies the Son— John 8:54
- The Father is one in whose name people are to be baptized— Mt. 28:19
- The Son sends the Spirit— John 15:26, 16:7
- The Son sends the Father— Mt. 26:53, Luke 23:34, John 17:1
- The Son is called "the everlasting Father"— Isaiah 9:6
- The Son is one in whose name people are to be baptized— Mt. 28:19
- The Spirit sends the Son— Mt. 4:1
- The Spirit anoints the Son— Acts 10:38
- The Spirit goes as he wills— John 3:8
- The Spirit inspired all scripture— Acts 1:16, 1 Peter 1:12, 2 Peter 1:21
- The Spirit indwells believers— Acts 2:4,
- The Spirit teaches— Luke 12:12
- The Spirit gives gifts— Heb. 2:4
- The Spirit indwelt John the Baptist and Jesus— Luke 1:15, 4:1
- The Spirit must not be blasphemed— Luke 12:10, Mt. 12:32
- The Spirit gives orders to people— Acts 13:2-4, 16:6 20:28
- The Spirit seals believers— Eph. 1:13
- The Spirit is one in whose name people are to be baptized— Mt. 28:19

Each of the Persons sends Another, but note this important fact: to send is not a statement of authority.

"The sending of the Son is best explained in terms of the Jewish *shaliach* principle: the one sent has the same authority of the one who sends. If this is the case, sending does not indicate subordination but equal authority." (Kevin Giles, *The Trinity and Subordination*, [God's Word to Women](#))

In addition, we should note the following unifying facts between the Father and the Son:

- Jesus cannot be separated from the Father (John 8:54, 10:30)
- Jesus recognized as the OT God in the NT (John 1:1, Phil. 2:5-11)
- To accept Jesus is to accept the Father (1 John 2:23)

Clearly, as we've seen in all of the above, the God of the Bible is a Trinity of three distinct Persons of one substance and divinity. They have general functions or "roles" with some overlap, but there is no necessary or exclusive authority among them.

Was the relationship between two Persons of the Trinity always "Father" and "Son" from eternity past? That is the central question to which we have come. But first let us clarify that denying hierarchy between them is not at all to say that Jesus did not always exist as God. The Trinity is an eternal being, and nothing can ever change that. Nobody in this debate is denying the eternal existence of Jesus.

But just as clearly there was not always a father/son relationship, as we've seen in references such as Ps. 2:7 and others. To **become** a father or son means previously this relationship did not exist; one cannot become what one already is. But of course, unlike created beings, the Persons of the Trinity always existed, yet without this particular kind of relationship.

Does a father/son relationship require hierarchy? Yes— for a time. A human child is not permanently under the authority of their parents. The parents only have authority as long as the child is dependent upon them, and as long as the parents have responsibility for the child. Although the relationship of parent/child will always exist from the moment the child is born until either the parents or the child dies, the hierarchy will end when the child grows up or otherwise reaches a state of responsibility and independence. So parent/child is not an indication of permanent hierarchy.

We have shown that Jesus was not always the Son to the Father, but that this added quality came at a point of time in history (see also Gal. 4:4). They had always related to each other as divine equals, but now Jesus would take on human form and become the Son as well. In Philippians 2:5-11 we see that Jesus (1) was equal with the Father, (2) voluntarily laid aside his position and became human, and (3) returned to his original place beside (not beneath) the Father. The hierarchy did not exist in eternity past, nor did it continue into eternity future. Jesus **voluntarily** took on humility and service, then returned to his former glory.

The popular term "eternal sonship" is thus an oxymoron which tries to deny that any father must necessarily precede his son in time; it is impossible for a father not to predate his own son. And if the Son was eternally subordinated to the Father, involuntarily and permanently, then this is a necessary and intrinsic quality of being, not a "role", and it thereby makes the Son inferior in being to the Father. And it follows, then, that since all Persons of the Trinity are eternal, then no one of them could possibly have preceded another in time, making a Father/Son relationship in eternity past impossible. To say otherwise is to make Jesus a created being; substituting "emanating" or "proceeding" does not change the fact. One Person could not possibly have caused another Person to exist, or we're not describing one God but three.

Likewise for the concept of hierarchy. It is logically impossible for two persons to be called "equal in being or essence" while making one permanently in authority over the other. There can of course be temporary or limited hierarchies between equals, such as employer/employee, parent/child, or magistrate/citizen. But unlike the

employee who quits, the child who grows up, or the citizen who moves to another country, one who by virtue of being or essence is made permanently and involuntarily subservient to another is not equal but beneath. So for the Son to be in a permanent inferior position to the Father is to make the Son unequal to the Father in essence— which is blasphemy, because it makes Jesus into a lesser god of inferior substance.

We presume too much when we read terms like sending, sitting beside, head, etc. Hierarchy is not necessary in order to differentiate between persons, so we must not read hierarchy into these terms but instead consider the context and implications of them. Jesus came into human history at a point in time, and he alone is unique among the Persons of the Trinity in having the dual nature of Divine Human. Yet the hierarchy that began with his birth ended after he accomplished the purpose of this incarnation. The relationship surely remains, but not the hierarchy.

What's the point of insisting we believe Jesus was eternally subservient to the Father? Why is this such an important doctrine to many today? How does it affect us as Christians? What pivotal and necessary component of the gospel does this teaching fulfill? The fact is, there is **nothing** in this concept of eternal subordination within the Trinity that affects the gospel or Christian behavior in any way. Not even when arguing apologetically with unbelievers is this an issue, because subordination is not a necessary component of the trinitarian view of God. In fact, it dismembers the One True God into three gods of unequal rank. One must choose between permanent hierarchy and absolute intrinsic unity; the two concepts are mutually exclusive.

There is only one reason this doctrine is so heavily pushed today: many proud men wish to use it as their justification for making themselves bosses over women while still claiming they don't say women are inferior. There is no other motivation or rationale, with the possible exception of the clergy/laity class distinction. It is the quest for power and control, for prestige and preeminence, that drives this effort to depict God as a boss with an underling who in turn has an assistant. They cannot conceive of either God or people getting along without one in charge of others, and they crave the seat of power.

This is not to say, however, that all who hold to the clergy/laity class distinction are deliberately being prideful, or that those who put males before females to one degree or another are aware of the implications of their beliefs. But such hierarchies are in fact unscriptural, and the ultimate blame for such teachings lies at the feet of influential teachers and leaders who wish to protect their places. Those who teach the "eternal subordination of the Son" empower the proud and provide the machinery that keeps the oppressed beneath them. Theirs is surely the greater sin.

From Organism to Organization

Human beings seem bent on arranging themselves into hierarchies, and the first apostles had to constantly struggle with legalists and the mentality of rule. Yet somehow they kept the congregations from getting too far out of hand while they lived. However, history tells us that not long after the last of them had died, the controlling spirit established itself as official practice and took root. Let us read some quotes from Philip Schaff in *History of the Christian Church*, § 42, Clergy and Laity ([source](#)).

The idea and institution of a special priesthood, distinct from the body of the people, with the accompanying notion of sacrifice and altar, passed imperceptibly from Jewish and heathen reminiscences and analogies into the Christian church. The majority of Jewish converts adhered tenaciously to the Mosaic institutions and rites, and a considerable part never fully attained to the height of spiritual freedom proclaimed by Paul, or soon fell away from it. He opposed legalistic and ceremonial tendencies in Galatia and Corinth; and although sacerdotalism does not appear among the errors of his Judaizing opponents, the Levitical priesthood, with its three ranks of high-priest, priest, and Levite, naturally furnished an analogy for the threefold ministry of bishop, priest, and deacon, and came to be regarded as typical of it. Still less could the Gentile Christians, as a body, at once emancipate themselves from their traditional notions of priesthood, altar, and sacrifice, on which their former religion was based. Whether we regard the change as an apostasy from a higher position attained, or as a reaction of old ideas never fully abandoned, the change is undeniable, and can be traced to the second century. The church could not long occupy the ideal height of the apostolic age, and as the Pentecostal illumination passed away with the death of the apostles, the old reminiscences began to reassert themselves...

After the gradual abatement of the extraordinary spiritual elevation of the apostolic age, which anticipated in its way the ideal condition of the church, the distinction of a regular class of teachers from the laity became more fixed and prominent. This appears first in Ignatius, who, in his high episcopalian spirit, considers the clergy the necessary medium of access for the people to God. "Whoever is within the sanctuary (or altar), is pure; but he who is outside of the sanctuary is not pure; that is, he who does anything without bishop and presbytery and deacon, is not pure in conscience." Yet he nowhere represents the ministry as a sacerdotal office. The Didache calls "the prophets" high-priests, but probably in a spiritual sense. Clement of Rome, in writing to the congregation at Corinth, draws a significant and fruitful parallel between the Christian presiding office and the Levitical priesthood, and uses the expression "layman" (laiko a[nqrwpō) as antithetic to high-priest, priests, and Levites. This parallel contains the germ of the whole system of sacerdotalism. But it is at best only an argument by analogy. Tertullian was the first who expressly and directly asserts sacerdotal claims on behalf of the Christian ministry, and calls it

“sacerdotium,” although he also strongly affirms the universal priesthood of all believers. Cyprian (d. 258) goes still further, and applies all the privileges, duties, and responsibilities of the Aaronic priesthood to the officers of the Christian church, and constantly calls them sacerdotes and sacerdotium. He may therefore be called the proper father of the sacerdotal conception of the Christian ministry as a mediating agency between God and the people. During the third century it became customary to apply the term “priest” directly and exclusively to the Christian ministers especially the bishops. In the same manner the whole ministry, and it alone, was called “clergy,” with a double reference to its presidency and its peculiar relation to God. It was distinguished by this name from the Christian people or “laity.” Thus the term “clergy,” which first signified the lot by which office was assigned (Acts 1:17, 25), then the office itself, then the persons holding that office, was transferred from the Christians generally to the ministers exclusively.

Solemn “ordination” or consecration by the laying on of hands was the form of admission into the “ordo ecclesiasticus” or “sacerdotalis.” In this order itself there were again three degrees, “ordines majores,” as they were called: the diaconate, the presbyterate, and the episcopate— held to be of divine institution. Under these were the “ordines minores,” of later date, from sub-deacon to ostiary, which formed the stepping-stone between the clergy proper and the people.

Thus we find, so early as the third century, the foundations of a complete hierarchy; though a hierarchy of only moral power, and holding no sort of outward control over the conscience. The body of the laity consisted of two classes: the faithful, or the baptized and communicating members, and the catechumens, who were preparing for baptism. Those church members who lived together in one place, formed a church in the narrower sense.

While we rightly point to the Roman emperor Constantine as the most powerful catalyst of this transformation of the Body of Christ into a club or institution, we can see from these quotes that the seeds of hierarchy were well established before his rise to power. In fact, I believe that this usurping of the priesthood of the believer had to have taken place in order for Constantine to assimilate it into his government. No doubt there would still have been a hierarchy-based branch of Christianity without him, but it would have had much less power and influence.

I am astounded that those who lived so near in time to the writers of the NT could wish for such a system, regardless of their backgrounds. Was not Paul completely and profoundly changed in his conversion? Was Peter not a different man after the Holy Spirit came upon him? And these early controllers had a much better grasp of the culture and language than we do, thereby having no excuses for their utter failure to follow their teachers. Yet it is these people, and not the first apostles, who have been followed through history.

There have always been dissenters who did follow the apostles, but they were typically marginalized at best, or hunted down and murdered at worst. Take for example the case of John Calvin, who in spite of his intense studies of the Bible and claim to desiring a return to true Christianity, hated and wished death upon those he

branded heretics ([source](#) Even in this historical commentary, as well as others, we see an attempt to somehow exonerate Calvin as a product of his time. Yet any who claim to have been reconciled with God through the sacrifice of Jesus have no excuses for hatred, much less murder, or for desiring the death of those who oppose them. It is never the place of any servant of Christ to play God by decreeing who lives or dies, nor to use civil law as a vehicle for personal vengeance.). Martin Luther is quoted as saying about Jews, "Consequently, if I had power over them, I would assemble their scholars and their leaders and order them, on pain of losing their tongues down to the root, to convince us Christians within eight days of the truth of their assertions and to prove this blasphemous lie against us, to the effect that we worship more than the one true God. If they succeeded, we would all on the self-same day become Jews and be circumcised. If they failed, they should stand ready to receive the punishment they deserve for such shameful, malicious, pernicious, and venomous lies" ([On the Jews and Their Lies](#)). And of course the history of the Popes is a history of depravity, murder, worldly ambition, and a host of other foul characteristics.

I will surely be accused of only "digging up dirt" or maligning a "good name" here, but can the name be "good" if the heart harbors such darkness? How can the love of Jesus live in such words and deeds? If the apostle Paul was not "a product of his time" after his conversion, then any who purport to be teachers, scholars, leaders, or role models for other believers cannot use that worn-out excuse. We are not products of time but new creations, redeemed and adopted children of God. Surely these people knew the words of the apostle John: "Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love." (1 John 4:7) And this is not about an occasional lapse or a moment of rage, but the character of a life.

Such is the legacy of the controlling spirit, a spirit that must defeat all its enemies and take on the role of supreme judge in this life, thinking the Holy Spirit is incapable of managing those He indwells. If anyone is to be respected as a Christian leader or thinker, let them first exhibit the life of one who has been radically transformed; let them model the heart of a servant; let them show their love for God's people by setting them free from oppression.